

Letter from Grace Ott, July 4, 1909, from Florence

*To her friend  
Neva in Salina*

Dear Neva:- It is the glorious 4th of July and I am wondering what every one is doing in "My own United States". We all wore American flags down to breakfast this morning and they looked good to us. But it made us feel kind of "queer like" not to hear any cannons or fire-crackers this morning to wake us - All we heard was the chiming of the convent bells and a band playing down at the Arsenal. Our hotel is on the banks of the Arno river and our windows look out over it. Its quite picturesque. Some one told us that we were not allowed to wear a U. S. flag unless we wore an Italian one with it but we are going to wait and see for ourselves. I heard a good Irish story this morning - An Irishman was uproariously celebrating the fourth and some one asked him what he was doing it for that, that [comma should go before first that] wasnt his country - "Wall" he said "can't Ou celebrate for moi native country even if I wase'nt born there". We are just like heathens - here it is Sunday and we are not even thinking about going to church. But we can go to church when we can't see the greatest pictures in the world and today is our last day in Florence. It would be hard to tell of all we have seen these last few days. Florence or Fierenze has not the interest to me that Rome has but I guess nothing ever will have. Into the Florentine galleries are gathered some [?] of the world's choicest art. Raffaele - Michael Angelo - Leonardo de Vinci, Andrea del Sarto - Reubens - Rosinni [-] Ghirlanjo [Ghirlandajo] ect - ect. Sunday evening - I don't feel as wicked tonight as I tho't I was going to. We have spent the day visiting the Academy of Art and the Pitti gallery and the great churches of the city. Nearly all the pictures in the Pitti are religious subjects - in fact one of a

secular subject is the exception. Nearly every event in the Bible we found illustrated in these wonderful pictures of the great artists. It was as good as a sermon to me. It is as Michael Angelo once said that he would rather teach by pictures than to be the most eloquent orator in the world and he certainly succeeds. Among the great pictures and statues we saw today were Raffaele's Madonna of the Chair, Gricuna's [?] Madonna, and Michael's wonderful statue of David - my favorite. Everything is saints, martyrs and angels and papa said he was so sick of looking at saints it would do him good to look a good old sinner like me in the face again. I have not kept up this letter day by day here because it seems so useless to try to record everything and I shall not attempt it -

We certainly do have good "eats" at this hotel - chicken twice a day - which is quite a treat for a preacher's family. - I heard today that a chicken was the most religious of fowls because those that weren't [sic] lay members went into the clergy - How is that. The fruit here is great and we always have 3 or 4 kinds for dinner. The cherries are so big that you have to take two bites on [?] most of them. They are those great big thick[?]meat ones!!!

One thing that goes rather hard on most of the Americans here is the scant breakfast - Coffee and rolls is all you get - and this is the custom all over Europe. But with us it goes fine because we never were feasted for breakfast esp. yours truly. Most of the people at this hotel are Americans and this noon we had a few toasts on Americanafter dinner and sang America - It sounded good let me tell you.

You know it runs in our family to make gestures. When we get back we will be worse than ever because that is the only way we can

make people understand. You can imagine what a time we have in a country where no one understands what you say or that you can understand. In Rome and [ampersand] Naples the cab men are regular cheats. You agree in the bargain to pay them a franc and at the end he wants two francs. Here cab rates are fixed by the law so we don't have trouble. We nearly always take a carriage because we can't make the street car men understand. Another queer thing is the tip-system. There are people just lined up everywhere to do little favors for you and then you tip them. When you leave a hotel the servants all line up on each side of the door for tips; porters, chambermaids, clerks, ect. ect. So if we come home broke don't be surprised. Supper is never served until 7:30 and is the big meal of the day. Then when we get to our rooms we have to go to bed by candle light - In some of the best hotels candles are burned. But we can't complain about not getting enough to eat. Every meal but breakfast has 6 or 7 courses. We are even now longing to get home and have a whole meal on one plate. It goes hard with people like us who aren't used to it and I know we sit at the table for an hour and a half every meal. Here I am telling you all this no count stuff when I ought to be telling you of "Florentine art". Well kiddo (between you and me) I don't know much about it. When I go to a gallery I want to enjoy the pictures for the beauty of them and for the interest the subject brings. Mrs. Van de Mark is an artist and her way of going thru' a gallery is very different from mine. She sometimes spends hours in just one room. She is one of the dearest women I ever knew. Something like Mrs. Smith K. C. Mr. Van and [ampersand] I have great old times he is so jolly. I got your letter at the Hamburg office here yesterday and I

Florence, 4

sure enjoyed <sup>every</sup> ~~at~~ every word of it. It seems ages since I left home because we live weeks in one day over here, and a word from dear old Salina and you is mightily appreciated. I was sorry to hear of your misfortune. I will give the matter some tho't and when I get to Venice with [sic--will] write at length about it. We stay in Venice a week to rest. So long deary. I wonder [?] why Gerty don't write me.

Lovingly Grace