26 June 1876

Dear Sister Helen,

I am so excited I can scarcely control myself! Father is taking Alfred and I to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (you know he is on the Finance Committee which has charge of all the expenses for the whole six month event). He thinks we need to see all the latest household stuff, since there will be exhibitors from all over the world and the whole idea of it is to show how American made goods stack up to the rest of the world's work. I know we are going to look at lighting fixtures for the new house. Alfred will want to spend all his time in the agriculture building. He is so involved in the farm and experimenting with seeds and fertilizers!

I have gotten a GORGEOUS new ball gown, as we will attend the Centennial Ball while we are there. It is shades of yellow (kind of a "goldish" yellow) with stripes on the skirt of tiny glass beads. The back is SO beautiful – the lines make my waist look TINY! And it has the cutest bow!

PLEASE beg Rufus to take you to the Exposition and Ball – it would be such fun to make up a party to go together!!

We have had all kinds of problems opening the house for the summer. We were late coming down. And after we got here the servants started getting sick, one after the other. The agency in Providence keeps sending us replacements, but I really think that some of them are VERY peculiar. We could not get a footman, as they had none available. The waitress they sent is so quiet and sad looking. She obviously has had a tragedy in her life. All the new maids HATE the country and are just waiting for an excuse to leave, I know.

On top of our servant problems, two days ago Papa Reed asked me to house some of his guests for this weekend, as he has some sort of board meeting at Edgehill, and the board members are bringing their wives. Of course, Gordon has some of his cronies

staying in the house, taking up space! At least Papa Reed is sending his friends instead of Gordon's riff-raff!

Papa Reed's guests are very nice, but maybe I am not cut out to be a hostess, for every one of the people he sent over has had a problem here. One of the ladies suffers terribly from some condition called narcolepsy. I never heard of it before, but evidently you suddenly fall asleep no matter what you are doing at the time. Well, she was a friend of Aunt Lizzie's (who has been down from Slatersville for a week visiting us), so Papa Reed sent she and her husband to stay with us. Anyway, Aunt Lizzie went to her room and found her collapsed over the desk. Fortunately, there was a book about narcolepsy lying on the couch, so she grabbed it and found out to just leave the person alone until they came out of the "sleep". It was a terrible shock to Aunt Lizzie – who isn't that well, as she tried to rouse her friend!

Father already had a gentleman from India staying with us. He is part of the Indian delegation at the Exposition. He just arrived so I don't know whether he will have special food requirements. Thank heavens cook is still with us and hasn't gotten sick. She is so good natured she'll be willing to cook whatever he requires. We did have quite an exciting moment when the maid was turning down his bed tonight. She had just started pulling down the covers and this snake slithered out from under the pillow. Well, of course, the poor girl screamed and jumped back, tripped on the rug and went down with a crash hitting her head on the bureau corner. I guess he travels with a pet snake, and it had gotten out of its travel case! Fortunately, he assured us it is non-venomous!

Then, just before dinner tonight, another of the ladies from Edgehill suddenly fainted. We brought her around, but she was moaning horribly and passing in and out of consciousness. We got her to bed and called in Dr. Taggart from East Greenwich. He brought the visiting nurse, Molly McGuinn, with him and left her to watch the lady. Evidently, she fell under the spell of some quack medicine seller and was taking something which stated clearly on the bottle not to take with any other medicine – and she has a small drugstore in her room!! I hope she will be better

tomorrow, since Dr. Taggart pumped out her stomach to get rid of the mix of medicines.

Anyway, I had a few friends here to see my ballgown and have dinner. I asked brother Johnny to sit in for Alfred, as he was in New York. Then at the last minute, I had to ask one of the other gentlemen to take the head of the table as Johnny and his friends had gone out sailing on the "Sagamore" and a huge fog came in so they put in to Newport – at least that is what the message they sent to me said! I know Johnny has no respect for my wishes!

Between Papa Reed's guests and mine we were ten at table. Fortunately dinner went smoothly, although I wondered how much experience the new waitress had. she was not very adept at serving us. We ladies retired to the parlor for coffee, and I ran upstairs to change into my new ballgown to show everyone. I hate to admit it but I have been overeating since we got to the country – what with the clean air and being outside playing tennis on our new tennis lawn and bicycling everywhere, I am ravenous all the time. The other day, I put the dress on and it was too tight, so I gave up eating almost entirely for three days.

Anyway, I ran upstairs, started getting out of my dinner gown to put on the ballgown, and all of a sudden the room started spinning and over I went on the floor. My maid managed to get me onto the bed until I could stand up again. What a stupid thing I did – oh well, live and learn!

Coffee was served in the parlor and while I was gone, Jennie Atwood choked on a "morsel" of cake really badly. (I wasn't there, so I can't say – but after watching her eating at the table, I doubt it was only a"morsel"!) Finally, one of the other ladies laid her over the arm of a chair and thumped on her back until the morsel came flying out!

The gentlemen, of course, remained in the dining room for port and cigars – and this was when we had a TRAGEDY! Apparently, our new waitress knew one of Papa Reed's friends – in fact had been a servant in his house along with her brother. Well, the man made MOST inappropriate advances to her, and her brother heard him and

beat him. Of course, he was sent to jail for a long time. The poor waitress really hated her former master and I guess she figured this was a chance to get back at him, so she put something in his glass of port and the poor man drank it and died!!

Through all of this, Father and the Indian gentleman were in the library discussing the Indian exhibit, which is about their cotton production. In fact, he has given us a small rug made of Indian cotton. Father wants to make sure all the exhibitors are happy. You know what a HUGE responsibility it is to have to worry about the success of that Exposition. President Grant has set his heart on this helping our country recover from the Panic of 1873. I don't understand these things, but father and Alfred say that when people go to the Exposition and see our American products alongside those from other countries, everyone will see how fine our workmanship is. IT HAS TO BE A SUCCESS!

Even the back of the house was in an uproar! Poor Alice, our regular waitress was in the pantry getting cook a dish she needed. She was up on the ladder reaching up to the top shelf to lift it down when a HUGE rat ran into the pantry. Evidently, someone left the back door open and the rat came into the kitchen. Well the kitchen maid climbed up on the kitchen table and cook grabbed a frying pan and went after the rat. It shot into the pantry and Alice jumped, over-balanced, and she and the ladder came down in a heap!!

Our gardener had just brought in a basket of apples to cook and was going out the back door when the rat ran across his foot. He jumped, slipped, and knocked himself out on the back hall counter.

I don't know what the staff will do about that mess. All the new servants will probably WALK en masse! What else can go wrong here. If you can, please come and stay a few days and help me through this crisis.

Your loving sister,

Elizabeth