

## Letter from Helen Keller to Alexander Graham Bell, July 5, 1918

F 25 SEMINOLE AVENUE FOREST HILLS L.I., N.Y. July 5, 1918. Dear Dr. Bell:

Will you sit down on the edge of one of those wonderful submarine-chasers you told me about—if such a swift thing can be sat on with perfect safety—and read this letter? Mind, you are to read it through, and you are not to get what you read mixed up with charts and things! What I am going to write about is most important, it is about you and me—and my teacher.

When we saw you in New York several weeks ago, we told you that the story of my life was to be dramatized for a motion picture, and we asked you if you would be willing to appear in it. You laughed and said, “Do you expect me to go to California to have my picture taken?” Well, it is not as bad as that—not quite. The present plan is to have several pictures made here and in Boston and vicinity before we start West where the main part of the picture will be made. The idea of the picture is to represent my development, education, ambitions, aspirations and friendships faithfully. The intention is, as far as possible, to show distinguished people who have been important in my life. The producers are very desirous to have you appear with Caruso and my teacher and me in the opening scene of the drama.

I feel the greatest hesitation in asking you to come a 2 thousand leagues for a “snapshot”. If I had not had so many proofs of your love and forbearance, I should not dare even to consider making the request. I realize the effort it will cost to make the journey to New York or Boston. I know how uncomfortable it is to travel in summer. But I hope you may agree with me that the enterprise may have sufficient value and importance for humanity to be worth the sacrifice. For a lifetime you have had steadily before you

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the vision of service to others. If the picture should fulfil our expectations, it will be a permanent contribution to education.

I believe it has been suggested that if you cannot come, some one might be “made up” to represent you, provided you would consent to such a substitute. But that would be only an imitation of you, not your dear self, and I should not know how to behave towards a mere substitute of you.

Dear Dr. Bell, it would be such a happiness to have you beside me in my picture-travels! As in real journeys you have often made the hours short and free from ennui, so in the drama of my life, your eloquent hand in mine, you make the way bright and full of interest, give to misfortune an undertone of hope and courage that will assist many others beside myself to the very end. You know that Gibbon has told us how, when he wrote the last lines of the last page of “The Decline and Fall,” he went out into the garden and paced up and down in his acacia walk overlooking Lausanne and the mountains. He says the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I conceive of the picture-drama as my walk under the acacias. I mean, in a sense it will be the finish of the story of my life. It should carry a message of hope and fulfilment. It should emphasize the significance of courage, faith and devotion. You can readily see, if the people taking part in the drama are not the real people who have walked with me under the acacias, this message will lose something of its force and genuineness. A number of the friends whose love and devotion have enriched my life are gone. Phillips Brooks, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Edward Everett Hale, Henry Rogers, Samuel Clemens and many others would have a place in the picture if they were living. You and Mrs. William Thaw are almost the only ones left who entered the acacia walk with me where it begins in the sweet dawn of childhood.

Even before my teacher came, you held out a warm hand to me in the dark. Indeed, it was through you that she came to me. How vividly it all comes back! How plainly I see the vanquished little child, and the young girl God sent to liberate her! Untrained, alone,

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almost blind, she journeyed swiftly to me. I still feel her strong, tender, quivering touch, her kisses upon my face. Sometimes I feel that in that supreme moment she thought me into being. Certainly she forestalled and defeated a cruel fate. O the waking rapture! O the shining joy of feet approaching light, of eager, inquisitive hands grasping knowledge! My fingers still glow with the "feel" of the first word that opened its golden heart to me. How everything seemed to think, to live! Shall I, in all the years of eternity, forget the torrent of wonders that rushed upon me out of the darkness and silence? And you are part of that wonder, that joy! I have not forgotten how you followed step by step my teacher's efforts to free my mind, my life, my heart from the tyranny of circumstance. From the first you understood the stupendous task of the young teacher. You were quick to recognize her ability, her tireless energy, enthusiasm and originality. I love you for the generous way in which you have always upheld her work. When others who had little faith in the power of spirit to conquer blindness doubted and faltered, it was you who heartened us for the struggle. When I made up my mind to learn to speak, you cheered us on with a faith that outran our own. How closely I felt your sympathy and forward-looking faith in me when I fought my way through college! Again and again you said to me, "Helen, let no sense of limitations hold you back. You can do anything you think you can. Remember that many will be brave in your courage." You have always shown a father's joy in my successes and a father's tenderness when things have not gone right. After all these years you still take us both up in your great heart.

How can I ever express what all this means to us? Words are not eloquent enough to declare all the good fortune, the pride, the joy, the inspiration we feel in your friendship. That is why we want so very much to have you appear in our picture. Your name alone is a rich harvest from which come high thoughts and desires. It is as a deep, sweet chime ringing in our hearts and telling us of a life beautiful in its boundless generosity, in its consecration to the service of humanity. As Praxiteles animated stone, so you have quickened dumb lips with living speech. You have poured the sweet waters of language into the deserts where the ear hears not, and you have given might to man's thought, so

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that on audacious wings of sound it pours over land and sea at his bidding. Will you not let the thousands who know your name and have given you their hearts look upon your face and be glad?

With dear love from us both, I am, Affectionately your friend, Helen Keller P. S. They would like to make the picture of you about the middle of this month.