



KALEIDOSCOPE

Love



Name: **Emma K**

Gender: **Female**

Country of residence: **Netherlands**

My experiences have shown me that my Jewish identity is a strength, not a weakness. Love is nothing without respect and understanding for the other. My Jewish identity will never again be negotiable. That, I know for sure.



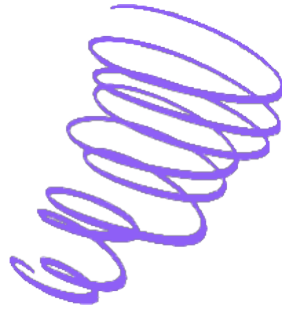
When I was asked to write this story, I became incredibly excited. This was a chance to share a part of my life that often remains unclear to the outside world. But where to start? What should I emphasize? Everything seemed too broad, too complex, and at the same time, it felt as if nothing truly captured the essence. After much thought, I arrived at a theme that continuously reappears and tests the strength of my identity: love.



When I think of love, I think of happiness. Love can be romantic, but the first form of love a person experiences comes from their parents. A person's family establishes the core value of what love means. It teaches you what love is, how love can bring and provide happiness. Later in life, people embark on their own search for happiness, ideally through a romantic relationship—the happiness of sharing life with someone who accepts you as you are. It is a search for someone you love in their entirety, including their background, values, norms, and beliefs. For me, this is not just a desire but a necessity. Although this search may seem exciting and almost self-evident to many, my Jewish identity has made it more complex. My experiences have taught me that love, for me, cannot be separated from mutual understanding and respect for my Jewish background.

At home, I was never told that I had to date a Jewish boy. My parents are fully Israeli but far from religious. My mother, in particular, scarred by painful experiences in the Israeli army, wanted a fresh start in the Netherlands, far from the community and the memories of her past. She carried deep traumas from her time in the military and wanted to protect me from that pain. She longed for a clean slate, a new beginning, far from what had hurt her. However, what she did not know was how closed Dutch culture could be towards someone with a different background.

This resulted in me growing up in an environment where there was little attention to my Jewish background. I never felt that my Jewish identity was something special or beautiful. My father tried to change that, which contributed to my parents' separation. He wanted us to fully understand our identity, but my mother rarely allowed it. Judaism as a religion did not play a prominent role in my childhood; my mother deliberately kept her distance from anything related to faith. She even encouraged me to date a Dutch boy. In her eyes, the Dutch were gentler and less traumatized than Israelis. This often clashed with my father's perspective. He believed in letting his children make their own choices rather than forcing them. As a child, I often witnessed their arguments—my first real image of a romantic relationship was anything but healthy. I had no clear understanding of what it meant to love someone in a healthy way.



As a child, this often made me feel different, an outsider forced into Dutch society. Because despite the fact that my mother made our family move from Amsterdam, we are at the end of the day a Jewish-Israeli family. To grow up as the only foreigners in a small Dutch village made me anything but happy. I was bullied a lot and felt alone almost my entire childhood, except when we were in Israel. We flew about 3x a year to visit family. These were the only moments in my childhood where I felt completely at ease. I was no different there, I finally belonged, had boyfriends and girlfriends. This way of growing up, this big contrast between Israel and the Netherlands, but also the contrast between my parents and their ways of raising me, has very much shaped me into the woman I am today. There was only one place in the Netherlands where I felt comfortable, Amsterdam.

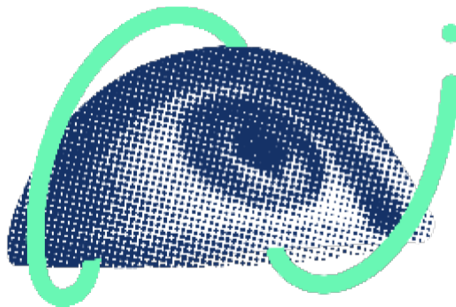


Amsterdam is my hometown, where I always felt accepted and didn't feel like that weird duckling in the pond all the time. When we still lived in Amsterdam, everything was calmer, more stable. When we moved, not only did I feel unhappy, but so did my father. I noticed that the move actually did no one any good except my mother. The relationship between my parents, as I just mentioned, broke down partly because of the fact that my father absolutely did not want to move out of the city. This led to my father and I increasingly moving to each other and to the city. We made our own traditions and he was always trying to teach me things about Judaism. This always happened when we were in Amsterdam; there was no room for it in the village. We regularly stayed in flats and hotels in the city for a weekend, that way it felt like old times for me and my father.

Every Shabbat we went to the market and visited museums, went for snacks at our favourite places. This started when I was young, to this day I keep these traditions with him. We found our regular spots in the city and Amsterdam always felt like home to me. My father and I try to meet up and see each other every Saturday, this is perhaps my favourite moment of the week.

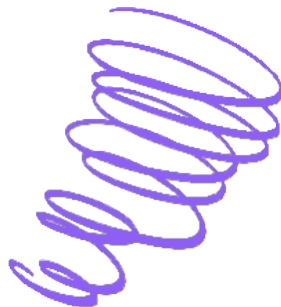
When I returned to my birthplace at sixteen, I finally found more peace within myself. I dared to form connections with people, to be myself again. Here, I met my first boyfriend, a Dutch boy. Despite my aversion to ultra-Dutch culture, I am attracted to blond men and often joke that I seek a Dutch appearance with an Israeli soul—a blond guy with temperament. He seemed to have that combination. Yet, I soon discovered that his temperament had a dark side.

Our relationship quickly became unhealthy, both physically and mentally. He was aggressive, manipulative, and deeply broken, with little interest in anyone but himself. Everyone knows that love can be blinding, and for me, it certainly was. For nearly two years, I stayed in this relationship despite all the pain. He always found a way to lure me back. I knew the relationship only harmed me, but I couldn't leave. I was young, my parents were going through a difficult divorce, and I felt like he was the only one who gave me love—while in reality, he was breaking me apart, piece by piece.



The moment I finally left came during an argument about Israel in October 2023. The war in Israel had broken out. Though we were “officially” apart, he was still in my life. This toxic cycle had been ongoing for nearly a year and a half. Time and again, I tried to cut him off, but he always found a way back in.

However, this time was different. I had made new friends during a trip with Taglit, an organization that arranges trips to Israel for young Jews worldwide. This experience profoundly impacted my life. Taglit gave me a sense of pride and connection I had never felt before. I met people who understood me without explanation. I rediscovered a part of myself that I had lost for years. That night in October, as he spoke disrespectfully about Israel, something broke inside me. How could I love someone who spoke so dismissively about something so essential to me? But this time, I also felt something new: the strength to finally let him go.



These relationships taught me a valuable lesson: my Jewish identity is not something I can or would ever suppress. It is an essential part of who I am, and it must be respected in a relationship. The idea that a non-Jewish partner might not fully understand my identity lingered in my mind. It put me in a paradox: I wanted to be open to love, but I feared being hurt again.

Dating as a Jew in the diaspora brings unique challenges. It's not just about finding love but also about identity, acceptance, and mutual understanding. Each relationship brought me closer to myself. I learned how to love, how to embrace both myself and others. But more importantly, I learned how I want to be loved. My experiences have shown me that my Jewish identity is a strength, not a weakness. Love is nothing without respect and understanding. My Jewish identity will never be negotiable again—that, I know for sure.

