

Bridges That Flicker

I used to think bridges were solid things.

Not just in the physical sense, but in the emotional one too. A bridge meant connection, effort, yes, but also certainty. If you built it carefully enough, honestly enough, it would hold. It would carry you across differences, across misunderstandings, across the quiet spaces between people who were trying to know each other.

I believed that if I showed up fully as myself, Jewish, creative, a little overthinking but deeply intentional, then the bridge would form naturally. That openness would be enough.

Most of the time, it feels like it is.

But then there are those moments.
Small, almost invisible moments.
The kind that last less than a second.

And yet, they stay with you.

It's in the shift of someone's face when they learn I'm Jewish. Not dramatic. Not hostile. Just a flicker. A recalibration. A split-second pause where something unspoken passes between us, like they are quietly rearranging me in their mind.

Before, I was just Rachel.
After, I am something else too.

It's subtle enough that you could question whether it even happened. I used to. I would tell myself I was overthinking it, that I was projecting, that nothing had changed.

But something always had.

That flicker is a crack in the bridge.

And what's hardest is that the bridge doesn't fully collapse. It stays. Conversations continue. People are still kind, still engaging, still seemingly open. On the surface, nothing is broken. But underneath, there's a quiet instability, a realization that the connection I thought we were building might not be as mutual as I believed.

It's not the loud, obvious forms of prejudice that linger the most. Those are easier to name, easier to confront. It's the hidden ones, the ones that exist in expressions, in tone, in what's not said, that are harder to carry. Because they leave you wondering, was that real? Did I imagine it? Or did I just watch a door quietly close?

I've experienced this more times than I can count. In classrooms, in social spaces, in relationships. Even in moments where I felt safe, where I thought the bridge had already been built.

And maybe that's what hurts the most, the realization that some bridges aren't as permanent as they seem. That they can shift depending on what people learn about you. That acceptance can sometimes be conditional, even when it's not meant to be.

But over time, I've started to understand bridges differently.

A bridge isn't just something you build once and walk across forever. It's something that requires maintenance, awareness, and, most importantly, participation from both sides. You can't carry the full weight of it alone.

For a while, I tried.

I tried to overcompensate, to be more likable, more agreeable, more easy to understand. I thought that if I just explained myself better, if I made my identity more digestible, then the flicker wouldn't happen.

But that's not what building bridges is supposed to mean.

A real bridge doesn't ask one side to shrink.

So now, I pay attention to who helps build it with me.

The people who don't flinch.

The ones who lean in instead of subtly pulling back.

The ones who ask questions not out of curiosity alone, but out of care.

The ones who show up as allies, not just observers.

Those are the bridges that hold.

At the same time, I've had to come to terms with a harder truth. Not every bridge can be built. And not every closed one is a failure.

Sometimes, the flicker is the answer.

It tells you where the limits are, where the unspoken biases live, where the connection you felt might not be as strong as you hoped. And while that realization is painful, it's also clarifying. It allows you to redirect your energy toward spaces and people where the bridge doesn't feel fragile.

Still, I don't want to stop building.

Because despite everything, I still believe in what bridges can be. Not perfect, not effortless, but real. I believe in the possibility of connection that goes beyond that split second, beyond that initial reaction.

I believe in the kind of bridge where there is no flicker.

But getting there requires honesty, not just from me, but from everyone. It requires acknowledging that hidden prejudices exist, even in places that feel open, even among people who believe they are accepting. It requires recognizing that those small moments matter, that they shape how safe and seen someone feels.

And it requires choosing, again and again, to build anyway.

Not because it's easy.

Not because it's guaranteed.

But because the alternative, stopping altogether, is a world with no connection at all.

I used to think bridges were solid things.

Now I know they flicker.

But I also know they can be rebuilt, stronger, more intentional, and shared, when both sides are willing to meet in the middle.

And that's the kind of bridge worth crossing.