

**The Space Between**  
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**Jeanlee Wallang Villaruz** is a dedicated hospitality professional and educator, currently serving as Program Chairperson of the Hospitality Management Program at Mountain Province State University (MPSU) since 2024. She holds a Master's Degree in Business Administration and earned her Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management from the University of Baguio.

Before joining the academe, she honed her craft in the hospitality industry through hands-on experience at Baguio Country Club and Le Chef at the Golf Club, Camp John Hay, where she developed her operational expertise and commitment to service excellence.

She is a certified holder of Trainers Methodology 1, which reflects her strong foundation in competency-based education and training. With her specialization in barista craft and bartending, she has become a sought-after trainer and mentor, conducting skills-enhancement workshops, industry seminars, and mentorship programs that equip students and professionals with practical, globally relevant competencies.

With her academic endeavor, industry experience, and unwavering passion for service, she continues to inspire the next generation of hospitality professionals while championing MPSU's vision as a culturally grounded, and innovative institution.

**The Space Between**

They often say the first child is the pride of the family, and the youngest is everyone's baby.

No one ever talks about the one in between.

Lara was the middle child. She grew up in the quiet spaces of her home, the spaces between celebrations, between expectations, between being noticed. When her older sister graduated, the house overflowed with balloons and laughter. When her younger sister learned to ride a bicycle, everyone rushed outside, cheering with cameras in hand.

Lara clapped the loudest for both of them. No one noticed she had won first place in the school's writing contest that same week. She told herself it didn't matter. Love wasn't something to be counted. But every birthday that ended with hand-me-down decorations, every family photo where she stood just slightly behind everyone else, every forgotten promise carved a silent question into her heart.

*Would anyone ever choose me first?*

Years passed, and Lara became the dependable one. She remembered birthdays, stayed up to help with homework, comforted everyone after arguments, and smiled through her own disappointments.

People admired her kindness.

Few wondered where she found the strength.

Then, one rainy afternoon in a quiet bookstore, she met Jeth.

He didn't fall in love with her because she was always helpful or because she never complained. He fell in love with the little things everyone else overlooked—how she traced the edges of old books before opening them, how she laughed with her whole heart when she forgot to be careful, and how she listened as though every story deserved to be heard.

One evening, as they walked beneath glowing streetlights, Jeth stopped.

"You always make sure everyone feels seen," he said softly. "Who makes sure you do?"

It was such a simple question.

Yet no one had ever asked it before.

Lara felt tears gather in her eyes, not because she was sad, but because someone had finally noticed the girl who had spent her entire life standing in the middle.

She realized then that her longing had never been for grand gestures or expensive gifts.

She had only wanted someone to say, *I see you. I choose you. You matter.*

When Jeth reached for her hand, it wasn't to rescue her from loneliness.

It was to remind her that she had never been invisible.

And perhaps that is the quiet strength of a middle child.

They spend so much of their lives learning to love others without expecting anything in return.

But when they are finally loved, not out of obligation, not as an afterthought, but intentionally, they don't just fall in love.

They finally come home.