THE LANDING TABLE

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - EVENING

Cold air slips in around the front door.

BEA, eleven, kneels beside a bowl of dog biscuits. She holds one out to a gray dog in a red sweater.

BEA
Sit, Pickle.

Pickle sits on her boot.

BEA
Close enough.

His owner, MR. CHEN, carries a box of soap to a table under a paper sign. GIVING TUESDAY. The Y is squeezed in at the end.

MRS. FLORES puts the soap beside a row of cans. She marks her list with a pencil.

MRS. FLORES
Thank you, Mr. Chen. How many?

MR. CHEN
Six. I counted twice because Pickle helped.

Bea slips both hands into her coat pockets. She turns them out. A leaf falls. Then a small pink button.

She puts the button back.

A woman comes in carrying two bags of rice. Bea holds the door with her shoulder.

WOMAN
Thank you, honey.

Bea watches Mrs. Flores make two more marks.

BEA
What time does it end?

MRS. FLORES
Seven. Then I get to see if all

this fits in my car.

The woman with the rice holds the door for a man Bea hasn't seen before. He carries a paper grocery bag with a long loaf sticking out. His coat is buttoned one hole off.

BEA
[under her breath]
Hi.

He passes her.

BEA
[a little louder]
Hi.

But the stair door swings shut behind him.

INT. SECOND-FLOOR LANDING - EVENING

Bea comes up the stairs. At apartment 2B, a doormat says OH, HELLO.

She stops.

BEA
[quietly, to the door]
Hi. I'm Bea. I live right there.

She points two doors down. Tries the words again without pointing.

A paper bag crackles behind her.

The new neighbor is sitting on the top step with a bowl of soup. A chair stands beside his door. An unopened box marked BOWLS sits on the chair.

NEW NEIGHBOR
I thought I heard somebody.

Bea puts her hand down.

BEA
I was going to knock.

NEW NEIGHBOR
I can go back in if you want to.

Bea looks at him. His face stays straight for one second. Then he smiles.

BEA
Are you having supper out here?

NEW NEIGHBOR
I am. I've got a chair, but I put a box on it.

He folds the top of his paper bag down to make a little wall around the bread.

NEW NEIGHBOR
I'm Ed.

BEA
I'm Bea.

She looks toward her own door.

BEA
I live right there.

She points this time. Ed looks where she points.

ED
Is that the door with the little bells?

BEA
Yeah. So my mom can hear me come in.

ED
I like those.

Bea takes a step toward home.

BEA
Well. Enjoy your soup.

ED
Thanks, Bea.

She walks down the hall. The spoon taps the bowl once.

At her own door she stops. She looks back.

Ed tears the loaf in half. He leaves one half standing in the bag. He dips the other in his soup.

Bea goes inside. The bells jingle.

INT. BEA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Mom slides two toasted cheese sandwiches out of a pan.

Bea stands by the kitchen table, still in her coat.

BEA
Do we have anything for downstairs?

MOM
I took the oatmeal down this morning. Want the crunchy half or the floppy half?

She holds up a sandwich that got folded over at one corner.

BEA
Crunchy.

Mom cuts it into two triangles.

Bea fetches two napkins from the counter. She puts one under her sandwich and tucks the other in her pocket.

BEA
The man in 2B is eating on the steps.

MOM
Is that where you want to eat?

Bea takes a long look through the peephole. She can see a square of carpet and somebody's umbrella leaning against the wall.

BEA
What if he just likes the steps?

Mom puts the pan in the sink.

MOM
You can ask him.

Bea picks up her plate. Sets it down. Picks it up again.

BEA
[quietly]
Would you like some company?

MOM
I'd love some.

Bea looks around. Mom grins around a bite of sandwich.

BEA
Mom.

Bea goes to the door. She cups the bells with her free hand so they barely make a sound.

INT. SECOND-FLOOR LANDING - EVENING

Bea carries her plate in both hands. Ed has moved down one step so people can get past him.

She stands on the landing long enough for him to look up.

BEA
Would you like some company?

Ed moves his paper bag off the step above him.

ED
Yes, please.

Bea sits. The step is colder than she expected. She gathers her coat under her.

They eat. Bea takes a bite so big it keeps her from saying the next thing she'd planned to say. Ed drops a piece of bread in his soup. He tries to get it with his spoon. It slips away.

Bea swallows.

BEA
You have to sneak up on it from the side.

Ed tries. The spoon comes up with the bread on it.

ED
Have you done this before?

BEA
Crackers. They're worse. They break up into a whole family.

Ed laughs. A little soup lands on his wrist.

Bea pulls the second napkin from her pocket and hands it over.

A soft scrabbling comes from below. Pickle's head appears around the bend. The rest of him follows, huffing.

BEA
Hi, Pickle.

Mr. Chen comes up behind him. Pickle sits on Ed's shoe.

ED
Is he waiting for something?

MR. CHEN
Your shoe. He thinks you've brought it for him.

Ed keeps his foot still. Pickle settles in.

BEA
We're having supper.

Mr. Chen looks at the two bowls.

MR. CHEN
I've got an egg on the stove. I'll get it before it turns into a rock.

He starts up the next flight. Pickle stays where he is until the leash draws gently tight.

MR. CHEN
[to Pickle]
You can come back.

They go up. Pickle's nails tick all the way to the next floor.

Ed picks up the bag.

ED
Would you like some bread?

Bea holds up the last point of her sandwich.

BEA
Maybe after.

Ed folds the bag open a little wider and puts it between them.

INT. SECOND-FLOOR LANDING - LATER

Mr. Chen comes down with a kitchen chair tucked under one arm and an egg in a cup. Pickle rides the last step on his bottom.

Mr. Chen sets his chair by the wall. He taps the egg with his spoon.

The stair door opens below. LUZ, a teenager in a green scarf, comes up with a chair folded flat. A clementine rolls out of her coat pocket.

Bea catches it against her plate.

LUZ
Oh, good. That's my supper.

Bea hands it back.

LUZ
Mrs. Flores wants this chair upstairs. Have any of you seen her?

Mr. Chen nods toward the lobby. Luz starts back down.

BEA
Luz?

Luz stops.

BEA
You could eat your orange here. If you have time.

Luz looks at the orange. She looks at the folded chair.

LUZ
My bus comes in twelve minutes.

She opens the chair beside Mr. Chen.

Ed holds out the bag. Luz takes a piece of bread.

LUZ
This is a better supper already.

She peels the clementine in one long strip. Bea cups her hands underneath to catch the bits. Luz puts half the orange in Bea's palm.

From downstairs comes a bump, followed by a second, smaller bump.

MRS. FLORES (O.S.)
I'm fine. It was the chair.

She comes up carrying another folding chair and a cardboard box. Luz gets up to take the box.

MRS. FLORES
I came looking for one chair and now I see three.

BEA
Do you want to sit for a minute?

Mrs. Flores looks down the stairs. She looks at her watch.

MRS. FLORES
I've got one minute.

She sets her chair by the wall and sits with a long sigh. Luz puts the box down beside her.

Bea takes the last triangle of her sandwich and pulls it in two. A thin string of cheese stretches between the halves. She holds both out to Mrs. Flores.

MRS. FLORES
Which one's for me?

Bea studies them. She gives her the one with the crunchy corner.

Mrs. Flores takes a bite.

The hall lights click off.

The green EXIT sign shines over the stairs. Pickle's tags jingle.

ED
Everybody still here?

BEA
I'm here.

LUZ
Me too.

A little crack in the dark.

MR. CHEN
That was my egg.

Bea laughs. A door opens down the hall and light spills out from her apartment.

MOM
Bea?

BEA
We're having supper.

A beat.

MOM
I'll leave the door open.

Mrs. Flores takes another bite. She leans back in her chair.

INT. SECOND-FLOOR LANDING - LATER

The hall lights are back on. Mr. Chen folds the empty paper bread bag while Ed stacks the bowls. Luz has gone. Her chair is folded by the wall.

Mrs. Flores digs in her cardboard box. She pulls out the GIVING TUESDAY sign.

MRS. FLORES
Your mom says you made that Y fit.

Bea traces the little Y with her finger.

BEA
I ran out of room.

Mrs. Flores turns the sign over. The back is blank. She hands Bea the pencil from her list and goes downstairs with her box.

Ed lifts the box of bowls off his chair and takes it inside. Bea writes with the paper flat on the seat.

Ed comes back out.

On the sign, in big, careful letters, Bea has written SUPPER HERE. Under it is WEDNESDAY. Below that, a 6.

ED
Six is good for me.

Bea looks at the doormat. She puts the sign next to OH, HELLO and props it against the wall.

She starts for home. The little bells ring as her mom opens the door.

BEA
[calling back]
Good night, Ed.

She doesn't stop walking to say it.

ED
Good night, Bea.

Ed picks up the sign. He takes it inside. A moment later the door opens again. He sticks it at eye level with two pieces of tape.

He presses down the corners with both thumbs.