

## Endless 63

### Chapter 63: Wandering Rat

"Everyone has three faces.

The self seen by others, the self as seen by oneself, and the truest self, untouched and residing deep within the soul."

On stage, Kedening performed passionately, his words sincere, fully immersed in the drama.

Below the stage, Bologue was also absorbed, watching the actors as if he were truly part of the story, observing its journey toward conclusion from the sidelines.

This feeling was wonderful, being caught up in the story, as if observing another person's life, extending his own fleeting existence in the process.

Music echoed up and down, and Kedening's expression was sorrowful.

He played the protagonist of the play.

By day, he was a hardworking laborer in others' eyes; by night, he was a skilled thief, and alone, he was a tortured soul.

"What kind of person am I?"

Kedening sat in his dark room, repeatedly asking himself.

"To satisfy the self others see, I continuously disguise and cater, while the self I see has long been lost in this constant 'performance.'

What does my soul truly look like?"

He appeared immensely pained, pounding the walls while the sirens rang out, and a monstrous shadow rose from the other end of the stage as sheriffs pursued, holding clubs and leading hounds, blowing shrill iron whistles.

The noise was piercing to Kedening, forcing him to stifle his sadness and flee in panic.

Lurking between two identities, he wrestled with self-recognition.

Kedening couldn't stop; he had to follow the steps of night, advancing like a stray dog.

Gradually, the song faded, the light on stage dimmed, and then the curtain slowly drew up as applause surged like a tide.

Bologue, along with other audience members, stood up clapping, cheering, and whistling.

This was a comedy called "Wandering Rat"... at least that's what the tickets said; it was quite comedic indeed, about the character Kedening played, an unlucky fellow named "Bart," whose identity blurred comically between theft and work.

At the factory, Bart often imagined himself a thief, moving stealthily, while during a burglary, he wielded a hammer as if striking steel in the factory.

This stark contrast amused the audience greatly, even Bologue, usually indifferent, couldn't stop laughing.

Bologue found the story fascinating, not just because Kedening was funny, but because he perceived beneath the comedy, a darkly absurd core.

After stealing, Bart would always reflect on himself, unable to see his own form, attempting confession yet not knowing what to say.

This realization, after the comedy, jolted one slightly into recognizing the icy reality.

Bologue thought it was quite good.

The only thing that irked Bologue was that this was not the end of the story. It was part of a series of performances, and Bologue happened to catch the last show before the finale.

The story's ending would be performed in half a month, reportedly with tickets already sold out. Bologue regretted it somewhat, wondering if he could get one from Geoffrey.

"Mr. Kedening Caesar!"

Amid the dispersal, calls continued; some audience members departed while others stayed seated, savoring the experience. Then a few reporters emerged from the crowd, pursuing Kedening with questions.

Kedening assumed a laid-back posture, not even changing out of his performance costume, and sat at the edge of the stage, listening to the reporters.

This was a small theater, and to survive in the Agreement District, competing with large theaters, Kedening had to utilize all available resources, never turning down interviews.

"Mr. Caesar, your 'Wandering Rat' has received strong reactions, do you have anything to say?"

"While it's a comedy, everyone can see the darkness beneath; why did you conceive such a story?"

"What will be Bart's ultimate fate?"

The reporters tweeted questions, some holding cameras and others readying notebooks to record Kedening's words.

Bologue also rose and approached, though not too close, choosing to sit aside, listening to their conversation.

He quite liked the story and wanted to hear Kedening's thoughts on it; such insight wasn't available on midnight radio.

"I can only say, thank you for the support. Allowing such a small theater as ours to survive in the Agreement District, I am truly grateful to everyone."

Kedening, his face adorned in colorful makeup, said gratefully.

"And as for why I conceived this story."

Kedening paused for a few seconds, still maintaining a smile on his face, and spoke slowly.

"This is related to me and my wife. We are both outsiders, and when we first came to live in Opus, it was both difficult and interesting. I felt that's how life is, joy and hardship coexisting.

Moreover, there was a time when I had to work two jobs to cover the theater's expenses, performing during the day and working night shifts. I exhausted myself to the brink, just like Bart in the story, switching between two identities, nearly confusing them, causing quite a few comedic mishaps."

Bologue slightly turned his head, looking at Kedening sitting at the edge of the stage, his words contained no trace of sadness. The achievements now overshadowed his past suffering.

Perhaps resonating with Kedening's words, Bologue also began to reflect.

Unlike Bart's identity switch, Bologue seemed to start another new life, looking back at the past; sometimes he would be amazed to find that familiar life felt just like that of a stranger.

Everything familiar became unrecognizable.

"Art stems from life, doesn't it?"

Kedening said with a smile.

"Combining with my own past, I came up with the story of 'Wandering Rat,' about Bart, living at the bottom of society like a rat.

He chose theft to survive, constantly switching and wandering between two identities. The pressure of reality made his lies full of holes, but to maintain those lies, he was forced to tell more, nearly collapsing."

"Sounds like a terrible tragedy." a journalist murmured.

"The core of comedy is tragedy... but everyone enjoys watching it, don't they?" Kedening smiled, "So I minimized the elements of tragedy as much as possible, mainly showcasing Bart's absurdity and blunders, and the jokes arising from identity recognition errors."

The journalist nodded in agreement, then continued to ask.

"And the ending? Will Bart gain a beautiful new life amid a series of unfortunate events, or will he continue to falter and confuse, leading to a mental collapse?"

The journalist's gaze was fixed on Kedening. He really liked the story of 'Wandering Rat.' For people like them at the bottom, it resonates irresistibly.

Those who are well-off laugh at Bart's antics, while they feel sadness and sympathy for Bart's struggle.

In the journalist's view, this is the perfection of 'Wandering Rat'; anyone can find what they're looking for in the story.

For this question, Kedening didn't answer immediately. He was silent for a while, frowning slightly, considering his response.

"I haven't figured it out yet."

"Not figured it out yet!"

The journalist looked surprised, to which Kedening could only apologize awkwardly.

"After all, the story was conceived based on my past, and I have yet to reach the 'ending' of my own path, so I haven't decided what kind of 'ending' to write for Bart."

Kedening said sincerely without being perfunctory.

"But it should be a comedic ending, right? Someone like Bart, having endured so much hardship, deserves a beautiful ending."

Kedening hesitated for a moment, then spoke with more certainty.

"Yes, that's the kind of ending it should be."



The journalists' faces began to show joy, and the flashes kept going off. They captured the image of Kedening; some had even figured out how to write their articles.

The bustle soon faded. Kedening sat down, exhausted.

The theater gradually quieted down as the audience left, leaving only some staff moving around, cleaning up the venue and organizing props.

Kedening forcefully rubbed his temples to ease his exhaustion, while David's words still echoed in his mind: some entity called "Evil Spirit" had attacked Norm, clearing out their goods.

In some sense, 'Wandering Rat' could be considered the autobiography of Kedening Caesar. Just that, in reality, he was not switching between worker and thief, but between "Man-eater" and actor.

In retrospect, it is perhaps because of this real experience that the story of 'Wandering Rat' is so touching.

Scattered applause sounded, and as Kedening followed the applause, he saw a lone audience member who hadn't left, seemingly waiting for him, until the very end, applauding.

"Quite a good story."

The person praised, got up, walked towards Kedening, and extended a hand, revealing his name.

"Bologue Lazarus."

Kedening looked at the audience who stayed until the end, and in return for those who supported him, he was always calm and friendly.

Smiling, he reached out his hand, saying.

"Kedening Caesar."