

# Soul

By Kirsten Bakstran

---

With a bone-curdling screech, a fire erupts from nowhere and a fierce cold fills the room. Out from the flames steps the Devil.

“Who dares call upon the Devil?” he says in a menacing voice.

“That’d be me”

The Devil looks down and blinks in surprise. Standing in front of him is a 12-year girl. She’s wearing a *Friends* sweatshirt with ripped jeans and bright pink Converse decorated with stickers.

“I’m Jenny,” she says, staring unflinchingly at his nightmarish face.

“Uhh okay,” the Devil says, looking around in confusion. “Nice..nice to you meet you?” He extends his hand in greeting, but when she doesn’t take it, he awkwardly pats her head. She scowls.

“Is this...where am I?” He asks, glancing at the crayon drawings decorating the wood plank walls.

“A treehouse. It’s my little sister’s though. I’ve totally outgrown this kid stuff”

“Righhht. So is your mommy or daddy around? I need to speak with the adult who called me to this mmm treehouse, as you say.” The girl rolls her eyes.

“I *said* I was the one to call you.”

“You? But you are so... little?”

“God, so even you are just like all the other adults,” she says, sticking her tongue out for emphasis.

“I am not!”

“Are too!”

“I am not!” The Devil says, this time truly riled as he stomps his pitchfork. The fire at his feet bursts forth again, licking at his billowing cape.

“Ugh whatever. Who even cares,”

The Devil tries to play it off like he doesn’t care either, even though he totally does.

“How did you even learn how to summon me, little girl?”

“Google,” Jenny replies, pronouncing each syllable separately, as if the answer were obvious. “Anyway, you grant wishes, right? Kinda like a genie or something?” She asks.

“No, I am nothing like a genie. I offer deals. Devious deals that seem too good to be true, and come at a terrible price” he says, adding a devilish laugh, but Jenny cuts him off.

“Sure yeah yeah, deals, wishes, whatever. Okay, I want you to bring my little sister’s fish back to life.”

“A fish? *That’s* what you called the Devil himself for? I’ve been called to revive many a lost life; lovers, children, soulmates, even the occasional dog I understand. But a fish?”

“Look, my mom made me clean Professor Plum’s tank (the fish is named Professor Plum by the way) and I was messing around or whatever and kinda dropped him down the kitchen sink drain.”

“Hmm, he could still be alive in there,” the Devil offers. “Maybe try fishing him out?”

“Duh, I tried that already, but I couldn’t quite reach him, so I went to turn the light on so I could see better and...accidentally hit the garbage disposal.”

“Oooh” the Devil winces.

“Yeah. And my sister Penelope is going to totally freak. She is completely obsessed with that fish. Probably because it’s cold-blooded just like her.”

“Right, well you’re just a child so I’ll offer you some advice; you don’t want my help with this. I am evil.”

“I know that. I’m not an idiot. But my sister is totally evil too. She’s gonna go berserk and absolutely turn my life upside down. Last time, when I spilled ice cream on a sweater I “borrowed” from her, she wrote letters from me to the cutest guys in 8th grade professing my love to them.

“Damn,” the Devil says.

“Yeah and that’s not even it. She also spread a rumor that my period is so bad that I have to get super absorbent pads specially made for me. You can never figure out what she’s going to do next, so I figured, better the devil you know right?”

The Devil didn’t want to admit it, but this little sister scared him a bit too.

“I see. Acceptable. What is it that you offer to the Devil in exchange for this...fish’s life then.” The girl reaches into a paper bag beside her and pulls out a well-loved t-shirt. She takes one more look at the back of it, which has an image of BTS above a list of concert dates. She takes a deep sigh before holding it out to the Devil, looking away in pain as she does.

“A t-shirt? How dare you disrespect the Devil with such a meager offering!” The girl gasps, and the Devil knows he’s made a mistake.

“It’s not just a t-shirt!” she screeches. “It’s official BTS concert merch from their 2019 US tour and I was wearing it when I touched Jungkook’s arm when he was walking out to his limo

after the show so it's pretty much the most important thing I've ever owned!" She spits it out so quickly the Devil can barely understand her. The girl's eyes are bulging out of her face, which has turned a bright crimson.

"BTS? What is this name?" The Devil asks hesitantly. He knows he should probably know them, but Hell is always a generation behind on pop culture. He has to wait for celebrities to die before he gets to see them, and even then it's only the evil ones. He is so sick of Charles Manson's droning songs.

"Oh. My. God." The girl says, staring at him with astonishment. "How have you never heard of BTS! They're only the best boy band to ever step foot on Earth." The Devil didn't like feeling out of the know.

"Oh yeah I think I've heard of them. That boy band, right." But the girl isn't buying it. She grabs an iPad in a bright chunky orange case from the floor, and navigates away from the "How To Summon The Devil: Kid's Edition" webpage to YouTube, where she has an array of BTS playlists. She purses her lips as she tries to decide which one to pick first.

"I mean, I guess I get it. BTS is everything that is good about the world, so why would you know about them, but still. Actually, I kinda wish I was you so that I could experience them for the first time again. Ah," she finally says as she picks a song; "Blood, Sweat, And Tears."

She moves to stand beside the Devil and shows him the screen. He watches as a few young men walk aimlessly around a museum. Holy music echoes in the background, which the Devil hates. But then...the men start to sing and dance.

"Wow, this choreography is really good." The Devil says, unable to hide the amazement from his voice.

"Yeah. They all work so hard to make sure every single song is perfect."

"The music too. Such a great mix of pop and soul with some clear hip-hop influences as well. It's a completely new sound but still feels so familiar."

"Right?!" the girl says, excitedly.

When the song ends the Devil can't help it.

"Um, can I see another?"

"Oh. Definitely" the girl says with a smile.

Three hours later, the girl and the Devil are both sitting cross legged in the corner, immersed in a heated argument while still watching BTS.

"I understand that Namjoon is the leader of BTS in a way, but he just doesn't have the dancing precision of J-Hope. Plus, I'm sorry to say but J-Hope is wayyy cuter. That's a fact."

“Omg, you are so wrong with that. J-Hope is cute, but he’s nowhere near as cute as Namjoon or even Jin for that matter.”

The iPad low-battery notification pops up.

“Dang,” the girl says.

“I could run home quick and get my charger,” the Devil says excitedly.

“Nah, that’s okay. My dad will probably have dinner ready soon.”

“Oh, right. Totally,” the Devil says.

“So about Professor Plum?” the girl asks. The Devil looks longingly at her BTS t-shirt. He picks it up and touches it lovingly.

“You should keep this,” he says, giving it back to her.

“Really?”

“Yes. And I’ll still revive your fish. Usually I ask for a piece of someone’s soul in exchange for a life, but you’ve given me something much more important. BTS.”

The devil snaps his fingers and there’s a bright flash.

“There you go. The fish is back in its tank, happy as ever.” The girl rushes up and gives him a hug. The Devil is shocked, but then hugs her back. She hears her mom calling her for dinner, so she grabs her shirt and iPad and rushes down the ladder.

“Oh, and you should know,” the Devil calls after her, “the fish will be evil so don’t stick your finger in the tank or feed him after midnight!”

“Okay, no problem!” she calls back up from below.

The Devil claps his hand, calling the flames up around him to return home while softly singing to himself,

*“Smooth like butter, like a criminal undercoverrrr.”*