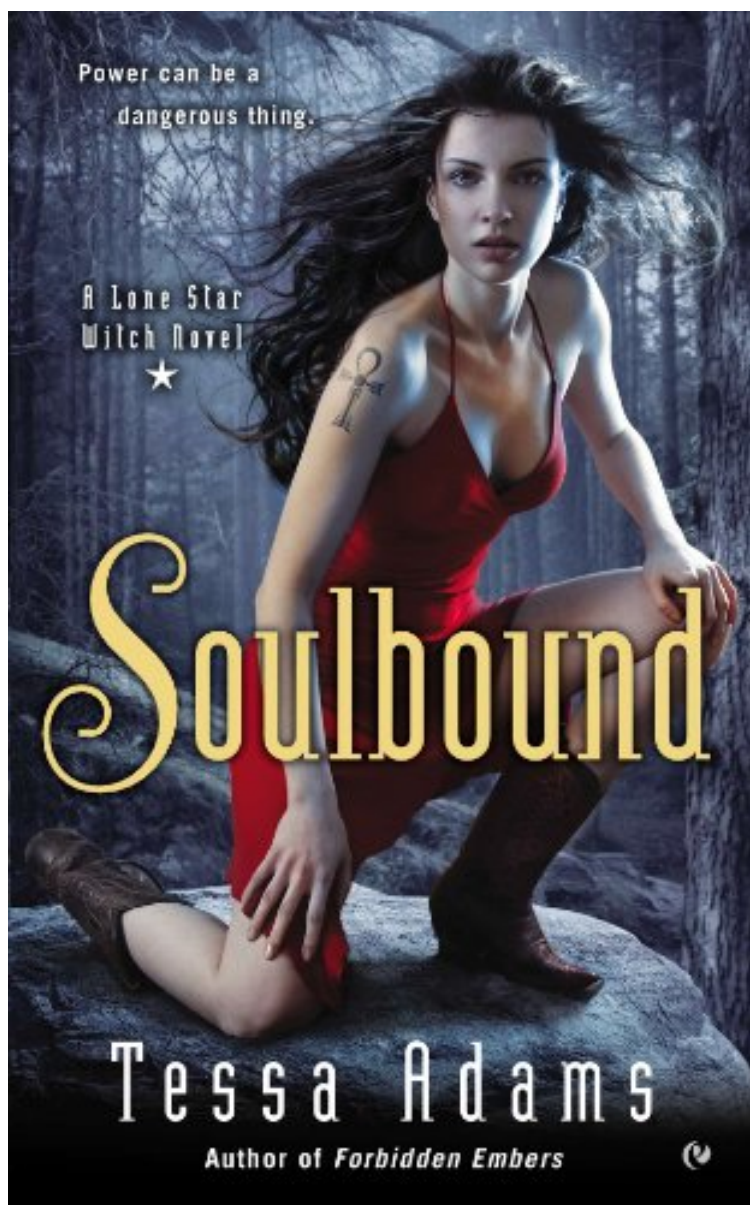


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Soulbound: A Lone Star Witch Novel



Par Tessa Adams

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAs the seventh daughter of a seventh daughterand a member of Ipswitchs Royal familyXandra Morgan should be a witch of incredible power. But things dont always turn out like you expect While she hasnt lived up to her familys expectations, Xandra has come to terms with her latent magic and made a life for herself in Austin, Texas, running a coffee shop where she makes potions of a non-magical nature. While things arent perfect, Xandra is happyuntil she runs into powerful warlock Declan Chumomisto. Xandra hasnt seen Declan in years, and though shes still overwhelmed by his power, she doesnt trust him. And when her own powers awaken one night and lead her to the body of a woman in the

woods bearing the symbol of Isis the same one that has marked Xandra since the day she met Declan filled with a terrible suspicion, soon confirmed: the woman is connected to him. Xandra doesn't want to believe that Declan is capable of murder, but as the body count mounts, and Xandra's own powers spiral out of control, she's not sure she can trust her own instincts.

Extrait Prologue

I was born on a dark night, under a Dark Moon in a sky turned bloodred with power and prophecy. Some say it was a less than fortuitous beginning to a new life of power, but as I squalled my way into the world, none of those bound to love me were disturbed by it. Why should they have been? Magic was everywhere. It was buning in the wall of flames that surrounded the birthing bed. Bubbling in the vases of sacred water positioned at North, East, South and West. Trembling in the blessed earth sprinkled all over my grandmothers prized Aubusson rug. Even spinning in the air that whipped around the room in a frenzy. Yes, magic was all around me. How could it not be when hundreds, thousands, of members of our coven were there, gathered right outside the walls of my grandmothers garden, straining for their first glimpse of the enchanted one. Of me. The news of my imminent birth spread quickly which was no surprise as it was the most anticipated, most celebrated, occasion the coven had seen in many years. Since the birth of my own mother some two hundred odd years before, probably. After all, it's not every day that a seventh daughter bears a seventh daughter, let alone does it on the seventh day of the seventh month. In fact, our historians swore that it had never happened before. Tales of my expected power spread until they became a thing of lore. Or even worse, until all those stories all those whispers became the norm. The expected. I would be great, powerful, untouchable by nearly all witch standards. It was one hell of a birthright for a scrawny, five pound baby, but my family was convinced I would live up to it. As were my coven, the Council and the entire magical world. And when the sky split straight down the middle, when it was rent in half by the most powerful forces of Heka of the goddess Isis, herself I moved from creature of lore to portent of legend. Lightning spun through the sky like a whirlwind, whipping around and around as it tore through my grandmothers roof and through the third and second stories of her house until it found me tucked safe in my mothers arms on the ground floor. And that's when it hit, lighting up my mother and me the whole room, really in a strike of such brilliance that it could be seen for endless miles. It disappeared as quickly as it had come, leaving the two of us untouched except for the golden mark that appeared on my neck and collarbone. A circle with the outline of a pointed half circle above it, it was Isis's most sacred symbol a magical tattoo that nothing could remove and one that no one had been gifted with before me. The legends and the expectations grew. And grew. And grew. Until no mortal could possibly live up to them. Especially not me.

Chapter One Winter 2005

My humiliation is complete. I can see it in their faces, in the way some are trying desperately not to look at me while others can't stare long or hard enough. I can see it in the embarrassed flush on my fathers cheeks and the clenched hands, wandering gazes and tapping toes of my sisters. And, most of all, I can see it in the way my mothers amethyst eyes have glazed over with mortified tears. In the way she keeps clicking together the heels of her favorite, ruby red pair of cowboy boots like if she hits the perfect spot shell spiral out of the room just as Dorothy did all those years ago. Too bad there's never a tornado around when you need one. I try to tune them out, to close my eyes and pretend that I'm up in my room, practicing, instead of standing here in the middle of my Kas Djedet my magical coming out party making a complete and total ass of myself. If I can do that, if I can just forget my audience of legions, then maybe this once I can find a way to make the stupid spell work. The fact that it never has before is utterly inconsequential to me now. Everything is, except making fire. Please, Isis, just this once. I beg of you. There's no answer, but then I didn't really expect one. Except for the day I was born, Isis has been notably absent from my life. You'd think, by now, I would have learned to stop asking. Still, I concentrate on the spell as hard as I can, repeating the words over and over again in my head like I've been taught. The charm itself is child's play or at least, a certain kind of child. But I've never been able to do it. Never been able to do anything when it comes to magic, no matter how much I study or how hard I try. Why I let my family talk me into believing tonight would be different, I'll never know. Maybe because I wanted to believe it as much as they did. Still, I'd warned my parents, weeks ago, that this party was a bad idea. Told them that I was going to fail. That I absolutely, positively could not do what they so desperately wanted me to. They'd refused to listen. You're simply a late bloomer, my mother told me. Your powers will unlock on your nineteenth birthday and you'll do fine. Isis knew what she was doing when she marked you. Trust me. You're just nervous, my dad concurred. Once you're up there, the magic will come. Performance anxiety, my oldest sister, Rachael, commented with a smirk that was a long way from sympathetic. Good luck with that. Still, despite her amusement, it was obvious that she hadn't expected me to fail either. But then, why would she? No one in my family fails. At anything. And certainly not at magic. There hasn't been a latent

witch on either side of my family tree for seven generations. And if there was going to be one, it certainly shouldn't be me. After all, with my birthright, I should be loaded with power. Showered with it. It should be leaking out my pores and lighting up everything I touch. Instead, it turns out that seven is not my lucky number. I can't do even the most basic spell. I try again. Nothing. Again. Nothing. In the audience, someone clears his throat, coughs, and the small amount of concentration I've been able to muster shatters. I glance around. I can't help myself and once again see the shock, the horror and disgust, rolling off the witches and wizards gathered in my family's ceremonial ballroom. Even my own family looks ashamed, like they can't believe I'm one of them. It's the last straw and more than enough to get me moving, to have me jumping off the circular stage set up in the center of the room and zooming out the French doors that lead to the patio. Behind me, my mother shrieks my name. In a booming voice, my father demands that I return to the ballroom at once. But I'm running full out now, scrambling to get away from the pity and the revulsion radiating from so many of the guests. They've come from all over our territory, all over the world, to witness the Kas Djedet of the youngest, and supposedly most powerful, Morgan daughter. What they've witnessed instead doesn't bear thinking about. No, I tell myself, nothing can make me go back there. Not when the joke that is my nineteenth birthday party is still in full swing, and maybe not even when it's over. My black designer cowboy boots, bought by my mother especially for tonight, pound over the hard, packed earth as I flee my yard for the safety and comfort of the peach orchard behind my house. The sweet scent of the fruit tickles my nose but I'm too busy sprinting down row after row of trees to notice. The only thing clear in my head is the need to get away. I don't come to a stop until I'm at the lake at the very end of my family's property. It's my thinking spot, the place I've been coming to brood and cry and reflect since I was a little girl. As far as I know, I'm the only member of my family to come here, and if I'm lucky, it will be the last place they think to look for me. Frustrated, fuming, I yank off my eight hundred dollar boots which are supposed to help me channel magic and instead have only aided in channeling mortification and hurl them, one after the other, into the lake. As they sink, I feel an incredible surge of satisfaction welling up inside of me. The first satisfaction I've felt all day, all week. All year. Screw magic, I tell myself as mindless of the Dolce Gabbana party dress I'm wearing (again courtesy of my mother) I sink down onto the moist dirt surrounding the lake so I can dangle my feet in the water. Being a latent witch isn't the worst thing in the world. It just feels like it now because of the party. Most days, it's actually a relief not to be able to practice magic. After all, who needs the hassle? The responsibility? And who actually wants to touch all those gross potion ingredients, anyway? A couple of tears roll down my face and I brush them impatiently away. I will not feel sorry for myself. I. Will. Not. Feel. Sorry. For. Myself. It's stupid and useless and utterly selfish. My life is better than a lot of people's, even if it doesn't feel like that right now. Leaning back on my elbows, I gaze up at the beautiful night sky above me. And repeat the admonishment again and again, until I almost believe it. I lay there until the heat of the summer night sinks straight through the cold brought on by nervousness and humiliation. Until my arms fall asleep from resting so long in the same position and my neck gets a crick in it for the same reason. And still I don't move. I can't. I'm transfixed by the idea of what comes next. Or, to be more specific, what doesn't. What am I supposed to do with my life now that it's clear, once and for all, that I am never going to follow in my family's boot steps. College? Backpacking through Europe? Getting a job a regular, run-of-the-mill job with no magic involved? Is it too much to contemplate all three? The possibilities stretch endlessly in front of me, not nearly as disappointing as they should be. I'm actually a little excited, to be honest, at least until reality comes crashing back down. There's no way my mother will let me do any of those things. No way my parents will just let me walk away from centuries of coven tradition to lead my own life somewhere else. It simply isn't done. At least not for me, the youngest princess in Ipswitch's royal family and second in line to the throne, right behind my only brother. Latent witch or not, my place is with the Ipswitch royal family of witches. No other choice will be tolerated. Depressed, I pick up a handful of rocks, then skip them across the surface of the lake, one after the other. I'm lost in thought, not paying much attention to what I'm doing even as I'm doing it at least not until the last stone goes spinning out of control. Instead of jumping harmlessly across the water, it starts to glow, to spin. Then it rises straight up from the lake about ten or fifteen feet in the air and hangs there, whirling, for long seconds before it explodes outward. Hundreds of small, burning red pebbles fall harmlessly back into the water. Eyes wide, heart pounding, I scramble back from the edge of the lake. Did I do that? I wonder frantically. But if so, how? I can't even light a candle using magic, let alone make a rock levitate and then explode. It simply isn't possible. No matter how much I want it to be so. I glance wildly around, looking for some explanation, some reason for that rock to have done what it did. But there's nothing, no one, on either side of me. Just to be sure, I turn to look behind

me . . . and thats when I spot him. Dressed in black, he blends completely into the surrounding trees. I wouldnt have seen him at all except for the small flames dancing back and forth along his fingertips. The show-off. What are you doing out here? I demand, keeping my voice steady with an effort. This is private property. I cant see his face, dont know who he is, but the power rolling off him is unmistakable. Not because of the rock or the fireboth are simple spells for someone who can wield magic. Theres just something about him, an electricity that fills the air between us, that overwhelms the peace and quiet of the lake with the unmistakable aura of potent magic ruthlessly leashed. Looking for you. He walks toward me slowly and as he does, he extinguishes the flames that have moved from his fingertips to his upturned palms. I can still see him, though. Away from the trees, the light of the full moon silvers over him. Hes tall, with broad shoulders, a narrow waist and long, powerful legs. I strain to see more of him, to figure out who he is though I am certain Ive never met him before. I would remember the aura of raw power that surrounds him its not something anyone could easily forget. With that realization, suspicion whispers through mean idea so outlandish I cant begin to credit it. But then he takes a few more steps and I get my first good look at his face. Razor-sharp cheekbones where they peek through his dark, chin-length hair. Full lips curled into a sardonic smile. Midnight eyes rimmed with impossibly long lashes. And a face so beautiful, so distinctive, that its impossible to forget. I dont know who he is and while theres a small part of me that wants to swoon at his feet, the majority of my brain is screaming for me to run. To get as far away from him as fast as I possibly can. I choose not to listen. Instead, I start to ask his name, but hes even closer now. So close that I can see his mark. Its a stark black tattoo in the shape of Seba, the Ancient Egyptian star, and like mine, it has been magically cast into the left side of his neck. Its an unusual place for a mark and seeing it has me stumbling, though I havent moved an inch. I catch myself, force my knees to hold my weight when they want nothing more than to buckle. Two thoughts hit me at once. First, that I was right about the power. The man who is even now slowly, inexorably, crossing the last few feet between us, is a warlock of almost unimaginable skill. One who straddles the line between light and dark, white magic and black. One who even my very powerful parents speak about only in whispers, despite the fact that his brother has been dating my sister for years now. Though Ryder celebrates most holidays with us, Declan has never before been invited to our house. Im not sure he was even invited this time. After all, my mother is adamant that we dont associate with his kind of power. And secondly, that hes even better looking than the stories proclaim. And thats saying something. He stops only a foot or so from me and though I want to look away, I force myself to meet the burning gaze of Declan Chumomisto, the man many consider the most powerful warlock living today. Some people say that hes losing it, that hes not nearly as formidable as he once was, but the rumbles only feed the rumors about him. Especially when he can still do things that most witches can only dream of. Standing here, across from him, I see no hint that hes lost any of that power. The air around us all but throbs with it. Which, unfortunately, makes holding my ground even harder than I expect. Being near him is intense, overwhelming. So electric that I can feel every cell in my body vibrating with the strength of it. Its also scary as hell. What are you doing here? I whisper, when what I really want to ask is why me? Why am I reacting like this to you? What did I do to attract your attention? And why did you come out here to talk to me when there are so many more interesting people back at the house? But reading minds must not be one of his gifts, because his smirk grows more pronounced as he answers my original question, The same thing everybody else is, I would imagine. I came for Xandra Morgans Kas Djedet. Of course he had. My cheeks burn with shame and I want nothing more than to duck my head and run away yet again. From him, from home, from the whole nightmare of my nineteenth birthday. Still, I might have fled earlier, but I wasnt raised to be weak. Tilting my chin, I ask, Did you enjoy the show? He laughs as predicted, but theres no mockery in the sound which is totally not what I expected. Your family will get over it. You know my family? This is news to me. Not really. But isnt that what people are supposed to say at times like this? When royalty screws up, royally? Now Im the one whos laughing. At least hes honest. Yeah, I guess they are. He glances down at my muddy feet. You want to sit? Do I? With him? I dont know. His laugh has calmed my earlier terror, but my heart is still practically beating out of my chest. Declan Chumomisto is talking to me. He extends a hand to help me settle, but I dont take it. I dont move at all for long seconds, just stand there watching him. Hes a grown man, powerful beyond my comprehension, and Im a nineteen-year-old screwup. We dont exactly have a lot in common, even if its only midnight conversation that hes after. Is something wrong? he finally asks, letting his hand fall back to his side. Theres no impatience in the question, no condescension. Just an honest concern that has me forgetting the whispers about him. Or at least putting them aside for a while. Despite my best intentions, I lower my guard. You mean besides the fact that I just humiliated myself in front

of my entire coven? I answer, settling down beside him as he takes off his socks and shoes. And what looks like a fair amount of outsiders as well, don't forget. Gee, thanks. I was totally in danger of forgetting that, so I appreciate the reminder. I do what I can. And not a thing more, I bet. I narrow my eyes at him. You need lessons on how to pretend to give a damn. Oh, I give a damn, Xandra. I just didn't think you'd want me to lie to you. I can try, but I warn you, I'm not very good at it. Someone like you doesn't have to be. I, on the other hand, have spent my whole life living a lie. Trying to be who my parents want me to be no matter how hopeless I am at it. Someone like me? There's a dangerous note in his voice now, but I don't care. I'm feeling reckless. I'm not stupid. I know who you are. Someone like you doesn't have to answer to anyone. This time it's his eyes that narrow. You'd be surprised. To the side of us a peach tree bursts into flame. For a moment, Declan looks stunned, like he can't imagine how it happened. I wonder what that would be like, to have so much power that it could just leak out like that without me even noticing. I don't think I'd like it. I'm too much of a control freak. A second later, the fire goes out as suddenly as it started. He doesn't say anything else and neither do I. Instead, we just sit here, the tension between us ratcheting up with each minute that passes. So, why did you come? I finally ask. You don't know my family, don't know me. You aren't even part of our coven. So why did you travel halfway around the world? Halfway across the country, not the world. I was in New York before this. Whatever. I couldn't care less about semantics when there are questions I want answers to. So why, out of all the places you could be right now, did you choose to be here? Because you're here. My gaze jumps to his. I've been careful not to look him in the eye since those first moments, scared of what I might find. Now, I know that fear is justified. Power overwhelming, unimaginable power swirls in the obsidian depths and I can't look away. I'm pinned, as trapped here as I was back there on that stage. More so, really, because here it feels like there's no escape route. No back door to scuttle out of. Nowhere to run. I desperately want to look away. But the pull is intense, like he's reached out and grabbed me and there's nothing I can do about it. I'm playing prey to his predator. Even worse, there's a strange lethargy pulsing through me. Pulling me into him. Pulling me under. I start to fall . . . No! I don't know what game he's playing, but I won't be anyone's pawn. Not anymore. When I jumped off that stage tonight and ran away, I started a new path for myself. A new life. Instinctively, I know that this isn't it. I finally find the strength to wrench my gaze from his and as I do, I feel this pop, like I've ruptured something deep inside. I gasp, wrap my arms around myself in an instinctive bid for comfort. Declan doesn't react at all, doesn't move a muscle, but I think he felt it too. When silver sparks of energy whip through the air around us, I'm sure of it. Reaching a hand out, I capture one of the sparks. I can't stop myself. I want to know, for just a second, what that kind of power feels like. It sizzles against my skin, crackling and spitting, burning me, until I open my fingers and let what's left of the spark fall back out into the air. My palm throbs where it touched me, white hot and painful. It takes all my energy not to flinch, but I manage it. It's my turn not to react. Except, Declan knows just as I did with him. He reaches out, gently cups my hand in his own. Strokes the fingers of his other hand lightly over the burn. It should have been smooth, easy, but the second his skin brushes against my palm, the entire world ignites. Fragments of memories I shouldn't have rush at me, terrifying, fascinating, compelling. I close my eyes, try to block them out, but they're still there behind my eyelids. Still there, deep in my mind as every nerve ending I have lights up like it's Christmas at Rockefeller Center. I order myself to pull away, to break the connection this one last time, but I can't do it. The pleasure, woven as it is amidst the pain, staggers me and I can't do anything but sit there and soak it all in. The pain dissipates as suddenly as it came, but in its place . . . in its place is a silver Seba, identical in all but color to the one on Declan's neck. What did you do? I gasp, looking at the new mark on my palm. It shimmers in the moonlight, is the most beautiful and frightening thing I've ever seen. That wasn't me, Xandra. But he looks shaken as his fingers close around mine in a grip so possessive it makes my breath catch in my throat. I start to pull back. This is too weird, even for the daughter of witch royalty, but then I realize his hand is shaking even worse than mine. It's enough, that hint of vulnerability, to keep me here when every instinct I have screams at me to flee. What? My voice breaks and I clear my throat, try again. What's happening? The sparks aren't stopping. In fact, they're spinning all around us like a freak, midsummer snow flurry, growing hotter, more plentiful, the longer we're touching. Declan doesn't answer, just shakes his head. I get the impression, right or wrong, that for all his power and experience he doesn't know what's going on any more than I do. I take a step back and electricity arcs between us, flowing from him into me and back again. Every cell in my body is vibrating with it, every nerve ending screaming with the agony of it. Just when I think it's over, that the electricity is going to rip us apart, he does something even more unexpected. He leans forward, and slowly lowers his mouth to mine. Rockefeller Center turns into Mardi Gras, the Fourth of July and New Year's Eve all rolled into one.

Too bad I never thought to wonder what happens after the ball drops. *Revue de presse* Praise for the novels of Tessa Adams: A sexy and intriguing new world. *New York Times* Bestselling Author Nalini Singh A steamy, exciting novel. *Fresh Fiction* [A] first-class, shapeshifting novel filled with a fiery passion that's hot enough to set the desert sands aflame. *Romantic Times* (Top Pick) A super thriller. *Genre Go Round* s