



# Golden Surrender (Vikings Trilogy Book 1)

*By Heather Graham*

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**TWO BOLD WARRIORS, TWO PROUD LANDS, UNITED BY PASSION—AND REVENGE. . . .**

PRINCE OLAF OF NORWAY—Lord of the Wolves, the golden Viking warrior who came in his dragon ship to forge a great kingdom in the Emerald Isle.

PRINCESS ERIN—Daughter of the Irish High King, the ebony-haired beauty who swore bitter vengeance on the legendary Norseman who had brought death and destruction to her beloved homeland.

Yet, in the great Norse and Irish alliance against the invading Danes, it was her own father who gave her in marriage to her most hated enemy. Bewitched by Olaf's massive strength, seduced by his power, still Erin vowed that neither the wrath of his sword nor the fire of his kiss would sway the allegiance of her proud and passionate heart.

*From the Paperback edition.*

## **Golden Surrender (Vikings Trilogy Book 1) By Heather Graham Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #113174 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-02-01
- Released on: 2012-02-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

*New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author Heather Graham has written over one hundred novels and novellas including category, romantic suspense, historical romance, and paranormal. Married since high school graduation and the mother of five, her greatest love in life remains her family, but she also believes her career has been an incredible gift. Romance Writers of America presented Heather with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003.

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### *Chapter One*

A.D. 852

From a window in the Grianan, the women's sun house, Erin mac Aed stared out upon the graceful wooden buildings and rolling slopes of Tara, the ancient and traditional home of the Ard-Righ, or High King of the Irish. Not long ago the meeting in the great banqueting hall had ended, and her mother had been called from the Grianan by her father. Since then Erin had kept her vigil by the window, for she desperately wanted to seek out her father.

She chewed upon her lower lip as she waited impatiently to see her parents return from their walk. It was a beautiful scene she stared upon. The verdant green grass dazzled beneath the sun until it appeared as a field of glistening emeralds, and in the distance the little brook that rounded the southernmost dun took on the hue of sapphires. Geese ambled about the brook, and cows and horses grazed lazily upon the hills.

Yet today Erin could not focus on the beauty and peace spread before her. She stared upon the grass and sky feeling as if the world spun. She could not help being haunted by memories. Visions of the past took precedence over reality, and although she swallowed furiously and blinked, the memories remained of fire, of blood, and the trample of horses' hooves that was like a thunderous beat. . . .

Mist seemed to settle over the sunblaze of the golden afternoon, and she saw herself too clearly, two years past, as she sat with her aunt, Bridget of Clonntairth, in the garden. Bridget, sweet, beautiful Bridget, had been laughing so gaily. But then the alarm had come and Bridget had forced Erin to flee. Erin had turned back in time to see Bridget burying her small pearl-handled dagger deep into her own heart in terror of the Norsemen coming. Then high-pitched screams had risen and risen to vie with the terrible drum-beat of the Norsemen's horses as they bore down upon her uncle's kingdom of Clonntairth.

Even now Erin could hear the bloodcurdling war cries of the Norsemen, the shrill wailing of the unprepared Irish. Even now she could smell the fire, hear the earth itself tremble with thunder. . . .

Erin blinked and forced herself to dispel the image. She drew in a deep breath and exhaled shakily, her excitement suddenly growing as she saw that her parents were at long last returning from the copse by the brook. She had sat with her eyes unwaveringly fixed on those trees since Maeve had been summoned, her fingers pulling knots in the threads of the robe she mended. In the two years since Clonntairth, she had tried to settle into living again. She had tried to enjoy being a princess of Tara, and she had tried very hard to convince her father and gentle mother that she had been able to put Clonntairth in the past, but she had never

fogotten, and she never, never would.

She knew that today the kings and princes of Eire met to discuss their stand in the coming battle between the Danes and the Norwegians. And though she hated the Danes, she despised the Norwegians—and one in particular: Olaf the White.

Just thinking his name made her palms grow damp, her body flush and tremble with fury and loathing.

Erin desperately wanted to know if the Irish chiefs who had debated all morning in the great banqueting hall would take a side; if they did, she prayed that they would not decide the Norwegians were the lesser of two evils.

"If you paid attention to your work, sister," Gwynn said sourly, interrupting her vigil, "your stitches would be small and neat. You should bring your head in from the window anyway. It hardly befits a princess to stare out with the ill-concealed nosiness of a farm wife!"

Erin started and drew her gaze from the window to glance at her older sister with a sigh of resignation. Gwynn had been picking at her all day, but Erin could feel no rancor in return. She knew that Gwynn was terribly unhappy.

Her marriage had been a dynastical one, to be sure, but Gwynn had been smitten by the young king of Antrim long before her royal wedding. Belatedly she had discovered that her prince's gallantry was the type to last only to the altar. Heith was handsome, suave, and charming, and now, with his wife five months pregnant and in her father's house, he was apparently practicing that charm on other women. But Gwynn dared not complain to her father; Aed would either chastise her for being a jealous wife or, worse still, vent the terrible rage he was generally known to control on her husband.

"You're right, sister," Erin said softly. "When I sew, I will try not to allow my mind to wander." She smiled at her sister, sensing the depth of misery that had taken Gwynn from a cheerful girl to a morose woman. "But you know, Gwynn, you always were the most talented of us! Mother used to despair of all our stitches, while applauding yours."

Gwynn slowly smiled in return, aware that she didn't particularly deserve the charity of one whom she had spent the day harassing. "I'm sorry, Erin, for truly I've been a miserable lot for you to draw today."

Erin dropped her stance at the window to go to her sister. She knelt beside her and placed her head briefly upon Gwynn's knees before meeting her eyes. "You are truly forgiven, Gwynn. I know that the babe makes you most uncomfortable!"

"Sweet Erin," Gwynn murmured, her eyes, so like her sister's, growing misty. Despite the bulk of her pregnancy, Gwynn was still a beautiful young woman. Her face lacked the ultimate perfection of her youngest sister's, but she had been sought by many a prince across the countryside. That fact made her life all the more bitter now. She laughed suddenly, for Erin had always been her favorite and guilt because of her harassment of her sister plagued her. "Off your knees, Erin! I'm behaving like an old witch, and you are humoring me. We all know it is not the babe who plagues me and makes me old before my time, but that worthless husband of mine."

"Gwynn!" Bride, the oldest sister, a matron now of three and a half decades and mother of grown sons, spoke sharply. "You should not speak so of your husband. He is your lord and you must give him homage."

Gwynn sniffed. "Homage! If I had any sense I would consult a Brehon and demand a separation. The laws declare that I would keep what's mine, which would hurt my noble husband. He would lose half his gambling assets!"

"Gwynn." The address came this time in a soft, quiet voice. It was Bede who spoke, and even the simple intonation of Gwynn's name was musical.

Bede had never possessed the beauty that even Bride still retained; her hair was a plain mouse brown, her face was thin. Her only true asset was the deep emerald eyes that she shared with her siblings.

She had always been the happiest of the brood, always able to find pleasure in the smallest things. That she had been promised to the church since birth had brought her complete happiness. She had joined her order at twelve and came home only for special feasts. She was here today because her father had requested that all his family be present, and as Ard-Righ his word was law.

"I do not believe you would be happy to set your husband aside," Bede said wisely, "for you love him still. Perhaps when the babe is born, things will improve. Remember your pride, sister, but remember too that time can be your friend. When trysts of the night have long since passed, you will still be wife and mother of his heirs."

Still at Gwynn's knees, Erin glanced at Bede's sweet face. Her sister's intuition was often startling. A nun Bede might be, but she was far from innocent or sheltered. She met the world with commendable good sense.

Gwynn sighed. "You are right, sister. I would not set the man aside for I am fool enough to love him. I crave him; I accept the crumbs of his affection and weep and scream when I discover his wenching! But . . . still I love him, and so I believe, as Bede suggests, that I will dazzle his heart again. When the babe is born. . . ." Her lashes lowered as she sighed and gazed once more upon Erin. "Do forgive me, sister. I thought to inflict misery upon you because I have become such a bitter wretch! You are wise, Erin, and in my jealousy I resent your wisdom in not marrying. Never marry! And never, never be foolish enough to love! Give your heart to God as Bede has done, if you would, but never, never let it be trampled by mortal man!"

"What rubbish you feed her!" Bride interrupted with derision. "She is past the age she should have married already, and you would have her go merrily on playing swordsman with our brothers until all hear of her lack of maidenliness and despair of her! She is the daughter of Aed Finnlaith! It is her duty to wed, as we have, sister, to better our alliances and hold safe our father's and brother's crowns!"

Bede, still and dark in her long black habit, suddenly moved impatiently. "Bride, leave the girl be—"

"I will not!" Bride snorted. "Father fears for her feelings like a foolish, besotted old man! Well, Clonntairth was a fact of life and Erin must get over it."

Mention of Clonntairth suddenly reminded Erin how faithfully she had watched for her parents to return. If she didn't hurry now, she would miss her father before he sent his servants for his bath, and then she would not be able to speak to him till late in the night.

She hopped to her feet, aware that her unseemly hurry would send Bride to Maeve with warning tales of woe, but Bride would not be at Tara much longer. When the meeting split and the tribes broke, Bride would return to her own province with her husband and sons. "Excuse me, sisters," Erin muttered. Then she fled them and the Grianan, smiling and acknowledging the other ladies who sat about sewing and conversing.

As she reached the open air, Erin overheard her father speaking with her mother about the meal that would...

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