

The Don of Donegal

Arthur McKeown



Illustrations by
Duncan Ross

Belfast
2006

Other Stories by Arthur McKeown

Battle of the Somme, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1999
Ricky Banks - Mini Star, Richmond Publishing, London, 1998
The Man from Peru, Richmond Publishing, London, 1998
Famine, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1997
Titanic, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1996
Robin Hood of the Cane Hill, Children's Poolbeg, Dublin, 1993

© Text Arthur McKeown 2006
© Original drawings Stratusfrans 2006
The right of Arthur McKeown to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, including photocopying, recording or otherwise - without the prior permission in writing of the copyright owner.

Publishing Ulster
Belfast
Northern Ireland

www.publishingulster.com

ISBN 1-905416-01-6

For the descendants
of the survivors
of the Spanish Armada

Contents

Chapter 1	<i>The End of the Storm</i>	1
Chapter 2	<i>Meeting the Old Man and His Dog</i>	2
Chapter 3	<i>Meeting Lord O'Donnell</i>	9
Chapter 4	<i>The Don's Story</i>	14
Chapter 5	<i>Setting Sail</i>	19
Chapter 6	<i>The Don's Decision</i>	25
Chapter 7	<i>More Decisions for the Don</i>	31
Chapter 8	<i>Living in Lord O'Donnell's Castle</i>	35
Chapter 9	<i>Old Michael</i>	41
Chapter 10	<i>Winter</i>	44
Chapter 11	<i>The Spanish Strangers</i>	47
Chapter 12	<i>Some Spaniards Leave Ireland</i>	52
Chapter 13	<i>Spring and More Decisions</i>	56
Chapter 14	<i>Living in Ireland</i>	58
Chapter 15	<i>After the Don</i>	61

Chapter 1

The End of the Storm

At last the storm was over.

The Don swam towards the shore after the *Sanita Maria* sank. The black water of the sea was still rough. It was a long way. He had no strength left when he reached the sandy beach.

For the first time in many weeks the Don felt dry land under his feet. Sea water poured from his torn clothes. He could scarcely walk and his legs were sore. He was out of breath. He could feel a damp place on his forehead where he had hurt himself badly during the storm. His whole body ached.

He staggered up the sandy beach and lay down under the cover of a rock. A thick bush sheltered him from the cool wind.

The Don watched as the September sun sank slowly in the west.

“Thank God!” said the Don. “Thank you, dear God, for keeping me safe through the terrible storm!”

He went to sleep, exhausted after all his troubles.

Chapter 2

Meeting the Old Man and His Dog

The Don did not know how long he had slept.

When he awoke the sun was high in the sky. He looked out from his shelter. He saw the sea, now calm and blue, and the green grass of the hillsides, with a few sheep far in the distance.

Then he saw an old man walking slowly along the sand at the water’s edge. A big black dog walked by his side.

The old man was carrying a piece of heavy wood over his right shoulder.

“Surely this old man cannot harm me?” said the Don to himself. “I need help, and food, and a place to rest.”

He watched the old man come closer, walking slowly across the smooth sand.

“Old man!” shouted the Don in a clear voice, as he came out from behind the bush. “I need help. Can you help me?”

The old man came closer. At first he did not say anything. He stood and looked carefully at the Don, seeing his torn brown jacket and the blood

on his forehead and the fine gold chain which he wore round his neck.

The old man's dog came closer and licked the Don's left hand. The Don patted the dog on the head.

"Down, boy," said the old man roughly. "Leave the stranger alone!"

The dog lay down on the sand, wagging his tail slowly.

"I need help," said the Don quietly.

"Aye, I can see that," said the old man, speaking slowly and carefully. "You look as if you are in a bad way, stranger. We do not get many strangers round here. Still, the dog likes you."

"He is a friendly dog," said the Don.

"Aye, he is indeed," replied the old man. "Come on, you may as well come back to my cottage. You need something to eat and drink and a chance to rest. Then after that you can tell me who you are and where you come from."

The old man walked slowly back the way he had come. The Don walked with him in silence.

The old man's dog ran up and down the beach in front of the two men, sometimes splashing in the sea at the water's edge.

After a mile or so they reached the old man's cottage. It was on the slope of a small hill at the other end of the beach. It was sheltered from the wind by tall pine trees. White roses grew thickly round the door.

There was a fat pig in a pen behind the old man's cottage. The Don could see a couple of hives for honeybees under an old oak tree.

The old man went up to the door and pushed it open. He waved the Don in, saying nothing. Inside it was dim and warm. A turf fire burned brightly at the far end.

"Stranger, it is not much, but it is my home," said the old man.

He took a goatskin and spread it over a pile of heather to make a mattress.

"Stranger, sit down and rest yourself," said the old man. "It may not look very comfortable but it is as good as any rich man's bed."

"Old man, you are kind," said the Don. "It is good to look after strangers who come asking for help."

"You need a good sleep," the old man said. "But first, something to eat and drink. I am a poor man. All I have is some bread and buttermilk. I will go fishing later to get something for our

supper. I will get you a warm jacket to wear. Also, let me put something on your head to soothe the wound.”

The old man got a heavy jacket from behind the door of the cottage. After that he prepared a dressing with dark herbs and tied it carefully on the Don’s head. Then he brought a big jug and some oatcakes from a shelf in the corner. He set them on the rough table near the fire.

“Eat, stranger,” said the old man. “Eat as much as you like. Then rest and sleep. The dog and I will go down to the rocks. We will try to get a good fish or two for our supper.”

The old man went out with his dog.

The Don got up slowly from the goatskin mattress. It was very comfortable, but he was starving.

He ate the oatcakes, all of them, and drank the buttermilk. He had never tasted anything like it in his life.

When he had finished the Don lay down again on the goatskin mattress. He was more comfortable than he had been for weeks.

Soon the Don was fast asleep.

When he awoke he could smell fish cooking. It smelled wonderful.

There were more oatcakes on the table.
“Are you feeling better?” asked the old man, smiling gently at his guest. He looked and sounded friendlier than before.

“I feel much better,” said the Don. “You are kind.”

“We will eat this fish with some bread. You can have more buttermilk to drink.”

The two men sat on wooden stools at the table, eating and drinking in silence.

The old man threw his dog some scraps to eat.

When they had finished the old man spoke again.

“Now, stranger,” he said. “Tell me all about yourself. Who are you? Where are you from? This is Donegal, where Lord O’Donnell rules. It is a land of rivers, lakes and mountains. Lord O’Donnell is a brave soldier. His people have lived here for years and years, as long as the high hills themselves. He pays tax, tolls and tribute to no one. But I do not think you are from this part of the world.”

“No, you are right,” said the Don. “I am not from this part of the world. I am from far away across the sea. My ship was destroyed in the great storm. I fear all my companions are lost.”

“Stranger, you have had a bad time. The storm was terrible,” replied the old man. “It is getting dark and now you need to rest again. Tomorrow, when we awake, I will take you to my Lord O’Donnell. You must tell him your story. Perhaps he can help you.”

The old man closed the door of the cottage to keep out the cold wind. He piled more turf on the fire for the night.

He lay down on his bed in the corner.

The dog curled up comfortably in front of the warm fire.

They all fell asleep, full of food and glad to rest at the end of a long and tiring day.



Chapter 3

Meeting Lord O’Donnell

Early the next morning the Don and the old man set off for Lord O’Donnell’s castle.

The two men walked along the narrow lanes in silence. The old man’s dog went with them, running ahead and sniffing at the smells of different plants and animals.

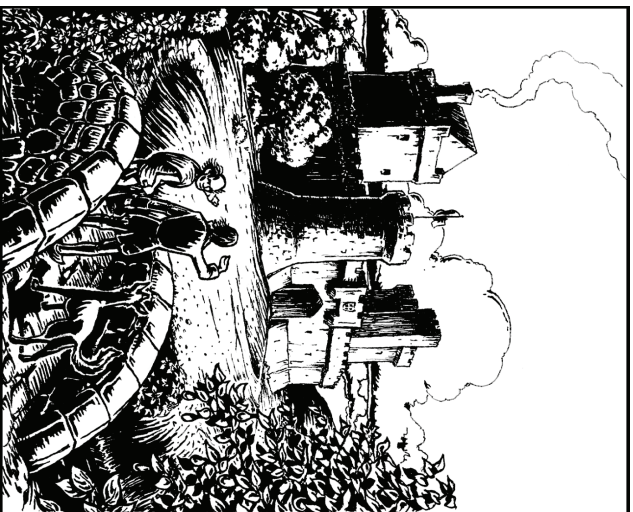
The trees were beautiful in the clear autumn light. The paths were dry.

It was blackberry time in Donegal. The Don looked in wonder at all the bright berries on the bushes. A few late butterflies flew here and there. He breathed in deeply as they walked along, smelling all the fresh flowers. The sight of heather, clover and harebells was marvellous. After all the weeks at sea on board the *Santa Maria* he rejoiced to breathe the fresh air of the countryside.

They passed a lake. Ducks, moorhens and a few graceful swans swam slowly on the sparkling water. Much of the land was stony and very rough. In a few places small patches of grain grew.

Before long the Don and the old man saw Lord O'Donnell's castle.

It was high on a hillside a mile or so from the seashore, with a good view over the countryside all around.



Outside the castle wall was a great garden. Lots of trees grew there, with all kinds of different fruit: yellow pears and red apples and purple plums and some green fruit the Don had never seen before. Rows of beans and peas grew against the back wall. There were bushes with berries of different kinds, with some early blackberries and late gooseberries. Down the middle of the garden the Don could see a stream running and could hear the soothing babble as it went over the pebbles. Everything was neat and well looked after.

In one corner there was a herb garden. The Don could smell the thyme, rosemary and mint. Their strong scents reminded him of his home far across the sea.

There was a high wall around the courtyard of the castle.

When the Don and the old man passed through the great gateway they arrived in the yard of the castle. Inside the courtyard were Lord O'Donnell's hall and some thatched buildings.

Beside the door of the great hall the Don could see two old women sitting with a bowl in front of them on a wooden table. They were cleaning fish. A few children were playing near them in the bright sunshine. A couple of cats sat on the

ground at their feet, eating any scraps the old women threw down.

In one corner there were some fat pigs in a pen. A few white hens clucked around, pecking at the ground. In another corner several milk cows stood tied to a wooden post. There was a strong smell of animals in the courtyard.

A tall man with grey hair came out through the main door of the hall into the bright sunshine. He was wearing a short otterskin jacket and tight trousers. He had black boots and a black cloak. He had a thick grey beard. He walked with a limp, carrying a heavy stick in his right hand.

“My lord,” said the old man. “I have brought a stranger to your castle. He seeks help.”

“Sir, you are welcome,” said Lord O’Donnell, looking carefully at the Don. “It is our duty to help strangers who come here and who ask for help. Come in, come in. You are welcome, indeed!”

The Don walked slowly into the great hall.

There were benches along the walls. A couple of tables stood together at one end of the hall. In many places the walls were covered with great rugs embroidered with pictures of fighting and hunting. The floor was made from slabs of smooth dark stone.

At the other end a log fire blazed, heating the whole hall. A couple of big grey wolfhounds lay snoozing in the warmth. Hams, glistening with salt, hung from a thick beam over the fire.

“Stranger, come closer to the fire,” said Lord O’Donnell. “The days are getting shorter. You must rest and enjoy what we can offer you.”

The Don sat down on a high-backed chair near the fire. Then a girl came into the hall. She was not tall, but slim and very beautiful. She wore a simple brown dress. She had a white linen cloth on her head, doubled over and tied under her chin.

“Stranger, this is my daughter Deirdre,” said Lord O’Donnell. “She is my only child. She has looked after me since her dear mother died four years ago.”

Deirdre sat on a chair in the corner of the hall near the fire. She looked into the fire, avoiding the handsome stranger’s eyes.

Two old women came forward. They brought plates and jugs to put on the table near the Don. He looked in wonder at the piles of apples and pears and the big ripe blackberries and the cheese and oatcakes and the jugs of sweet milk and buttermilk. It had been weeks since he had seen so much fresh food.

A cook, wearing a white apron over his clothes, carried in pieces of beef and lamb piled high on a dish. They were warm and steaming.

“Eat, stranger,” said Lord O’Donnell. “You are welcome to all we have.”

The Don stretched out his hand and started to eat.

Lord O’Donnell also sat down and began to eat.

“Now, stranger, you must tell us about yourself,” said Lord O’Donnell when they had finished.

“You look noble. I think you are from somewhere far from here. And I would also say that you did not come here on foot.”

Everyone in the hall laughed at Lord O’Donnell’s joke.

“Stranger,” he continued, “I think you must have an interesting story for us to hear. Travellers always have a tale to tell. So tell us all about yourself.”

Chapter 4

The Don's Story

“Lord O’Donnell, thank you for what you have given me,” said the Don. “There is nothing better in life than you have given me already. The old man also looked after me well in his cottage. I was tired and he let me sleep in comfort. He, like you, fed me well. Now that I have rested I want to tell you all about myself. And I need to ask for your help.

I will tell you how I came here and all that has happened to me since I left my home many weeks ago.

My name is Don Alvaro de Mendoza. My father is a close relation of King Philip. Our family is one of the noblest in Spain.

Our home is Barcelona, the most beautiful place in the whole world. Surely no place on earth is better than the place that a man can call his home?

I grew up in my father’s castle, on a hillside above the port where my family has lived for many, many years. My father has rich farmlands,

with hundreds of farmers who pay him rent and hold him in great respect.

When he was a young man my father was a soldier in the army of our King. Our home has many treasures which my father won as an officer in the service of Spain when he fought in the Low Countries. We have marvellous furniture; every room has been decorated in the most elaborate way.

I have a brother and three sisters, all older than me.

When I was a little boy we all had a wonderful time, playing with our nurse who watched over us. She was a strict old woman but she was very good to us. We had lots of fun with all our animals and games.

When I was a little older I had a marvellous teacher, an old priest from Cork. He was a holy man and told me much about the world. He taught me mathematics, and Latin, and poetry, and geography, and history. Also, he taught me your language. We practised it together when we went on long walks in the countryside near my home.

One day my father talked to me about my future. He said I could enter public life as a diplomat or help to run the family estates. For a while I

thought about becoming a priest in the Church. In the end, after much thought and prayer, I became a soldier.

Just after my sixteenth birthday I became a junior officer in the army of our great King. I went to serve in the colonies in South America. It is a dangerous place and very different from anywhere I had ever been before. We had many battles against the people there.

My job was to lead small groups of scouts on military expeditions. We travelled deep into the countryside, gathering information to make maps for our army. It was difficult and dangerous work. Sometimes the Indians captured our scouting parties and did terrible things to them. Many were tortured and killed. It was horrible. But we were soldiers and we had to do our duty.

The countryside was very beautiful. Sometimes we went for days and weeks across great plains, far from hills or mountains. I led my men up great rivers in small boats, with thick jungle on every side. We heard and saw noisy birds, many with long tails, and wild animals we had never seen before, and glorious plants with blossoms of exotic colours.

In that land the weather was very cold in winter but in the summer it was hot and sticky.

Many of my companions became sick and died of strange illnesses. Our doctors had never seen such sicknesses before and could do nothing to help. Their cures and medicines were useless.

I fought in several great campaigns and was rewarded with treasure when we captured towns and cities.

After four long, hard years my regiment returned home to Spain, bringing our treasure. My servants carried many wooden chests, filled to the top with gold and silver and rubies and pearls.

My family was very happy to see me. My mother and sisters cried. They were glad we had survived all the dangers of the military expeditions.

Then one day last spring another officer in my regiment came to visit me secretly. He told me that our great King Philip was planning to attack England and asked me to serve again in the army. I agreed because it was my duty to serve my King and country.

King Philip was in dispute with Elizabeth, Queen of England.

He supported Elizabeth's cousin Mary and wanted her to be Queen instead. Elizabeth kept Mary in prison for several years. Then last year

Elizabeth gave orders for her cousin to be executed.

Our great King Philip was also angry because English pirates often attacked Spanish ships when they were coming back home full of gold from America. He decided to attack and try to bring Elizabeth down.

But now, Lord O'Donnell, I must tell you about the journey that brought me here to your country. I will tell you about my voyage and all the troubles we had, and the fighting, and the terrible weather - and the shipwreck.



Chapter 5

Setting Sail

It was a bright morning in late May when we set sail from the port of Lisbon.

Our fleet had one hundred and thirty of the finest ships in Spain. Our sailors were the best in Europe. They had the best arms and equipment our King Philip could provide.

I was the commander of the *Santa Maria*, one of the best ships in the fleet of our great King Philip. There were more than two hundred soldiers and sailors on board, as well as twenty eight heavy guns. We had a lot of experience of fighting against the enemies of Spain throughout the world.

The priests blessed our ships and their crews before they left the harbour. The Archbishop prayed for the success of the fleet and for the safety of the brave men who sailed on this dangerous expedition.

The Commander of the Fleet was the Duke of Medina Sidonia, a close friend of my father.

I watched the ships which were following the *Santa Maria*. All along the coast lots more ships

were setting sail. Flags flew on top of the masts. It was a wonderful sight.

This was the Spanish Armada!

More than 20,000 soldiers and sailors were going to attack England. We had doctors and priests on every ship. I had two servants, men who had grown up with me in my father's house. The other officers had their servants too.

As the sun rose higher into the sky our ship moved further and further from the coast of Spain.

We watched, my officers and I, while the hills of home got smaller and smaller as we sailed slowly away.

All the Spanish ships were big. They all had lots of heavy guns. They carried enough food for six months. We had sacks of rice and great round cheeses and huge sides of salt pork and bacon. We also had salt beef, tuna fish, oil and vinegar. There was lots of water and wine for the soldiers and sailors to drink.

The sea journey took several weeks. The weather was more like winter than summer and the north winds were against us. But at last we caught sight of the coast of England.

The English ships were waiting for us!

For several days we moved up the Channel, looking for opportunities to attack the English fleet.

We sailed closer and closer in a great curved line. Smoke blazed from our guns as each captain fired his heavy cannons.

The English ships were smaller and faster than our ships. They could move more easily in narrow spaces. The English soldiers were good at fighting on ships.

Suddenly one of our Spanish ships exploded! Its ammunition store had caught fire. There was a terrible bang. Flames leapt up into the night sky. Huge pieces of timber shot high in the air.

Later, when our ships were anchored off the French coast at Calais, the English admiral sent fireships towards the Spanish fleet.

It was nearly midnight.

I stood with my officers watching from the *Santa Maria* as the fireships moved towards us. They drifted closer and closer, filled with pitch, moving like ghosts across the smooth sea.

Closer and closer they came, moving more and more slowly.

Then there was a terrible WHOOOOOOSH as, one after another, the pitch on the fireships burst into flames!

Our big Spanish ships could not move away quickly enough.

There was lots of noise and smoke as we tried to avoid the fireships. We broke formation and scattered all across the sea. On the *Santa Maria* we were terrified in case our ship caught fire too.

I could not see very much but in the darkness I could hear men shouting and screaming.

The *Santa Maria* was badly damaged when another ship crashed into us. Many of the brave men in the crews of both ships died, lost for ever in the deep water.

Some ships began to sink. Others started to head out to sea.

I do not know how many ships were lost or how many of our brave men died, but I believe it was a terrible disaster for our great King Philip.

In the hurry and panic we escaped to the safety of the open seas.

I gave orders to my men to keep the *Santa Maria* away from the rocky coast of England and the fireships. As dawn came I could see how much damage had been done to our fleet. Some ships

had sunk. Others were still afloat but were burning fiercely.

Then the wind changed. A new danger threatened us. The remaining Spanish ships were blown away from the rocks and sandbanks between England and France. We were terrified in case the winds blew us towards the rocks.

We headed out to sea. The wind blew us northwards.

I did not sleep for more than a couple of hours at a time. I was worried about what might lie ahead in the cold north of Britain, but we had no choice. My officers and men were exhausted. It was my duty to get home with my crew in the *Santa Maria*.

Some days we could see English ships far in the distance, sailing behind us. So we kept on, sailing further and further north.

We sailed on for many days. We needed to find a place where we could repair the damage to our ships. Also, we needed fresh food and water.

I spent many hours with my officers, looking at maps and charts to work out our position.

From time to time we caught sight of another Spanish ship but most of the time we sailed on alone.

Our food was going bad. The flour for the bread was grey and smelled terrible. The salt pork in the barrels was starting to turn green. We had no wine left. The water was finished. The tongues of many on board started to turn black because they had nothing to drink.

Some of the crew went crazy and started to fight among themselves. It was hard for my officers to control them. Many on board became sick; some of them died in great pain. We had to throw their bodies over the side of the ship in case they infected the rest of us. A priest said prayers as our dead companions sank into the dark water.

I was afraid to land on the coast. I was sure that we would be in danger if we met any of the people who lived there.



Chapter 6

The Don's Decision

After two weeks we reached the north of Scotland.

We had two choices. We could turn our ship round and head back down the east coast; or we could try to get home by going down the west coast.

It was a difficult decision. I discussed it for a long time with the officers in my cabin, looking carefully at our maps and charts. I thought for hours before I made up my mind.

“Head for Ireland!” I shouted to the crew.

I had decided to head west and try to go round the Irish coast. I thought we would be able to escape from the English ships and get home to Spain.

We sailed on, heading out into the Atlantic on our way to Ireland.

By this time life and conditions on the *Santa Maria* were terrible.

The stink was awful. We had no drinking water left; each barrel had a thick green slime on its

surface. Our cheese and bacon and rice were full of maggots; even though we were starving we could not bring ourselves to eat them.

Each day some of the crew died because of their wounds or the diseases on board the ship. Almost everyone was weak. Many of the crew were mad with hunger and thirst. Every day we had to throw the bodies of some of our companions into the sea. We sailed on, glad to be alive but sad to have lost so many of our crew.

For three days our ship sailed south and west towards Ireland. We kept a careful lookout for English warships, but we did not see any.

Our maps and charts were not much use; they were old and not very accurate. For much of the time we could not be sure exactly where we were.

We wanted to keep as close as possible to the mainland, so we could avoid any English warships.

At last we came near a small island. We felt the sea get rougher as we passed between the island and the mainland.

We found - too late! - that there was a whirlpool ahead of us. We could not turn and go back. We had to sail as close as we dared to the rocks of the island. We had no time to change direction. We went between the edge of the whirlpool and

the sharp rocks. The sea was getting rougher and rougher. The raging wind swept two of the crew overboard.

We managed, with great difficulty, to steer our ship away from the swirling water and get to the calm of the open sea.

Then we sailed on, glad to have escaped from the whirlpool.

The sea was much calmer now and the wind fell. By now the *Santa Maria* was badly damaged. The crew had to work hard at the pumps. Some used buckets to empty the bottom of the ship where the sea water was leaking in.

We sailed on until we came to a place where there were great rocks with six sides, rising high from the sea to the top of the cliffs. Never in my life had I seen such a wonder!

We kept close to the land, to avoid any English ships which might be in the area. In the distance we saw a great castle, set on the edge of a high cliff.

We passed the mouth of a wide river. In the distance we could see fishermen pulling great nets full of fish from the water. As we passed by, far from the coast, we watched their little fishing boats tossing gently on the sparkling water of the silver sea.

Then the storm started.

As evening fell I could see black clouds in the sky. A great storm was coming.

At first the wind was not fierce but before long heavy rain was falling. Soon it was dark and cold and very windy.

Men shouted, the wind howled through the ropes, clouds blotted out the light from our eyes. We threw overboard as much equipment as we could, hoping to making the ship lighter and easier to control.

Night came, covering the sea as the heavens thundered and lightning flashed again and again across the sky.

We had never seen such a tempest. Our ship, with its tired crew, was in great danger. It was tossed about by the roaring winds and huge waves. Many of my officers and men were already sick and weary.

The sailors were terrified. Many fell to their knees and prayed. Some cried, with tears flowing down their cheeks. We threw some of the ship's arms and equipment over the side.

The sea was black and rough. We saw neither the sun nor the stars for hours. The waves were huge, as high as the hills! Our ship rose and fell

in the water, tossed this way and that in the tempest. No one could control it. The wooden sides and the tall mast cracked loudly as the strong wind and heavy waves smashed against the ship.

The winds seemed to roar and howl from every direction at the same time, whipping up the sea and rolling the waves towards the shore.

I heard some of the terrified crew on the deck.

“I am sorry I ever left Spain,” shouted one man.

“I wish I had died in our sea battle with the English! If I get back home I will never go to sea again!”

Suddenly a huge wave, much bigger than any of the others, crashed over the ship. Many of the crew were washed overboard. I never saw them again.

The storm tossed the ship all over the sea.

Then there was another terrible crash, even louder than any of the others.

Another great wave rose high out of the sea and smashed into the ship.

I was washed off the deck, hitting my head badly on a great piece of wood. I found myself swimming in the cold, dark water.

I swam on and on. The water was rough. My whole body ached.

At last the storm stopped and the sea got a little quieter.

I do not know how long the storm lasted.

After a long time I felt some rocks under my feet. I realised I must be near land. Then I put my legs down. I could stand. The water came up to my waist. I walked slowly out of the water.

At last I was safe on land!

I staggered further up the beach. Sea water streamed from my torn clothes.

My head hurt badly. I was very, very tired.

I lay down under a big rock, sheltered from the wind by a thick bush. I had lost everything except this gold chain which my dear mother gave me before I left Spain.

Then I fell asleep.

Chapter 7

More Decisions for the Don

The Don's story was finished.

Everyone sat hushed and quiet in the great hall of Lord O'Donnell.

Then Lord O'Donnell broke the silence.

"Don Alvaro de las Españas, you have told us a marvellous story," he said. "It is a terrible story, too. You had a hard journey in the last few months. The weather here in autumn is often very bad. Your ship and crew suffered greatly."

"Thank you, Lord O'Donnell," said the Don.

"But now I must ask your help. I am a stranger in a strange land."

"Don Alvaro, we will look after you," said Lord O'Donnell. "You have seen some of the wonders of our coast as you sailed to Donegal. You are lucky to have escaped from the great whirlpool at Rathlin; many ships have perished there. The strange rocks with six sides are the Giant's Causeway, where the giant Finn McCool crossed to Scotland to fight his cousin. Then you saw the great castle of Dunluce."

"This is a marvellous land," said the Don. "It is full of wonderful sights, greater and better than anything I have ever seen, even in America."

He looked across the great hall. Deirdre, Lord O'Donnell's beautiful daughter, was watching him with shining eyes.

"It could be dangerous for you to stay here, Don Alvaro," said Lord O'Donnell.

"But is it not more dangerous for me to travel through the hill country?" asked the Don. "Surely English soldiers are everywhere, looking for Spanish soldiers like me who have been wrecked on the coast?"

"Don Alvaro, you are right," said Lord O'Donnell. "Lord Fitzwilliam, the English governor, has given orders that all Spaniards who come ashore must be captured and taken to him. But Donegal is a remote place; Lord Fitzwilliam and his English soldiers seldom come here. So you have two choices. You will find friends here with Bishop Redmond; he does not like the English and will be happy to help you. You can try to go back home to Spain through Scotland. Or you can stay with us till the winter is over. We are no friends of the English. This is wild country and we do not welcome them when they come."

Everyone in the hall cheered. Lord O'Donnell was a great fighter against the English when they came to Donegal.

"Lord O'Donnell, thank you for your offer," said the Don. "I will stay quietly in your home. I am tired and I need to rest. It is too dangerous, I think, to travel where the English might find me. Also, it will soon be winter and it would not be easy to find my way in a strange country."

"You are welcome to stay," said Lord O'Donnell. "You can live quietly here. The English soldiers will never find you. We will be happy to look after a brave and noble man, such as you are. You can join us when we go hunting in the hills or when we go to visit our neighbours. We are cattle men, but the cattle are not always our own!"

Everyone laughed again at Lord O'Donnell's joke. Cattle stealing was a great sport for the lords of Ireland. He was one of the greatest cattle raiders in the north of Ireland.

"Thank you for your kindness to me," said the Don.

"We must help you now," said Lord O'Donnell. "We will get you fresh clothes to wear and strong boots for your feet. Also, you need some

ointment for your wound, to help you get better quickly."

In a far corner of Lord O'Donnell's great hall one person was very glad that the Don was going to stay. Deirdre said nothing; but she continued to look closely at the handsome stranger who had come from far across the sea.



Chapter 8

Living in Lord O'Donnell's Castle

The Don soon settled down at Lord O'Donnell's castle.

He rested for several days and began to feel better.

Everyone was very kind to him. He was still tired and sick after his terrible journey and the shipwreck. People brought him presents of fresh food to help him get his strength back.

When he started to recover the Don wanted to do some work on the land around the castle.

As the weeks went by he enjoyed the hard work in the fresh air. Some days he worked in the fields with the other men and girls, helping to bring in the oats and barley. The Don worked hard on Lord O'Donnell's land. The work was different from anything he had ever done before. He was young and strong, and he learned quickly.

One evening he went fishing with Lord O'Donnell. They went out from the shore in a little fishing boat. "We will eat well tonight, Don

Alvaro," said Lord O'Donnell. "The best fish in the world live in the sea here."

They rowed slowly away from the beach, then dropped their lines over the side.

When they had finished the bottom of the boat was filled with cod, mackerel and herring, and a few other fish the Don had never seen before.

During the day he helped the men to prepare the buildings for the winter.

They put new thatch on the sheds and carried big stones from the fields to repair the walls. A couple of men spent a few days replacing loose cobbles in the yard with new stones they brought from the shore.

One day the pigman came to the castle. He did not speak very much. The men herded the pigs into the sty, waiting for Lord O'Donnell to come. There was a lot of squealing from the fat pigs, all crowded together.

Then Lord O'Donnell arrived.

"It is time to choose our Christmas dinner, Don Alvaro," he said. "We cannot feed all the animals through the winter. We keep some and kill some to give us meat during the cold season. Now then, which ones will we keep and which ones will we send to the pigman?"

The pigs squeaked and squealed as Lord O'Donnell poked and prodded them with his stick. When he chose a pig the men pulled it out of the sty. They took it off to the other side of the yard where the pigman stood.

Everyone came out into the yard to watch.

The pigman held a long sharp knife in his hands. A wooden rack with hooks and ropes stood against the wall; there were some buckets underneath. He plunged the knife into the pig's heart, quickly and skilfully. All the people clapped.

Some of the men lifted the big animal and set it in a great basin of warm water. After the body had soaked for a while they lifted it out again and set it on a bench. It was easy to scrape off the hair.

The pigman and the men lifted the dead pig on to a hook; it hung down, with its head nearly touching the ground just above a wooden bucket. It stayed like that for several days.

Then the pigman came back and finished off his work. First he cut off the head and removed the bones. Then he cut the rest of the body into pieces. The old women took these and put some of them into barrels of salt water; others were hung over a smoky fire of oak wood in Lord

O'Donnell's hall. They melted the fat to make tallow for candles, to give light during the long winter nights.

Another job was to bring in the turf for the cold winter months. During the summer the men had spent days and days out in the bogs, using spades to cut the brown sods for their winter fires. They had stacked them on the edge of the ditch, one against the other, to dry out in the summer sunshine and the breezes that blew across the open bogland.

The Don went with the men to gather in the turf. Lots of children and some of the women came too. Some men carried great empty creels for the turf; others put creels on the donkeys they took with them. A long line of men, women and children walked out of the yard of Lord O'Donnell's castle heading for the bog with the donkeys. It was pleasant, walking along in the late autumn sunshine.

Everyone chatted and laughed as they went.

At the bog they filled the creels to the top with the dry turf and put them on the backs of the donkeys. Some men took the donkeys back to the castle. While they were away others filled the empty creels.

At the castle some men stayed to pile the turf neatly against the wall inside the yard, beside the stack of logs. Others took the empty creels and donkeys back to the bog.

The long day wore on, until by evening all the turf they had brought from the bog stood piled high against the wall ready for the winter.

Another day the Don went rabbit hunting with Lord O'Donnell and the other men. They took the dogs with them. They walked a long way, past a big lake.

"Now we must go quietly," said Lord O'Donnell. "We must not frighten the rabbits."

On the slopes of the hill in front of them the hunters saw dozens of rabbits sitting quietly or playing together. Many were nibbling the short green grass.

The men crouched down, hiding behind some gorse bushes. The dogs pantred excitedly, held back by Lord O'Donnell's men.

"Let the dogs go," whispered Lord O'Donnell.

The dogs rushed away when the men let them loose. They started barking loudly as soon as they ran off.

The terrified rabbits fled in many directions. The hunters stood upright, watching closely as the

dogs ran into the thick bushes after the rabbits. The men could see nothing but they could hear the barking and yapping of the dogs.

A few minutes later the dogs started to come back. One after another they came out from the bushes, each carrying a dead rabbit in its mouth. The hunters moved closer. The dogs dropped the rabbits at the hunters' feet, then ran back into the bushes.

When they set off to walk back to the castle each of the hunters had a big bag of rabbits.

As the winter came closer and the weather got colder the Don stayed inside, watching the men repair their farm tools. He liked being with the blacksmith. He was a huge man, with thick arms and great muscles. He wore a heavy leather apron and sang loudly but not very sweetly as he banged the hot metal with his hammer. It was hot and noisy in the forge where he worked.

"The winters in Donegal are long and cold," said Lord O'Donnell to the Don one day when they were in the fields together. "Life here can be hard and difficult."

The days got shorter and shorter; the nights were longer and longer. No one moved much outside if he did not have to.

Chapter 9

Old Michael

One day Old Michael and his daughter came to Lord O'Donnell's castle.

"Old Michael is coming. He was seen this morning on the hill," said one of the men. "He will be here this evening."

There was great excitement. Everyone stood up and went out into the hall.

"Who is Old Michael?" asked the Don.

"He is a great singer and storyteller," answered Lord O'Donnell. "He is an old man. And he is nearly blind. No one knows where he lives. He comes here sometimes; he tells us the old stories about our ancestors and the great deeds of heroes in the past. We will have a feast and celebration tonight, then he will sing the old songs and tell us his stories."

A little later the Don watched as the old man, with long white hair, came slowly into the yard.

A young girl, about nine years old, led the old man by the arm, guiding his footsteps over the rough ground.

"Where are we now, my child?" asked the old man. "What place is this? Who lives here? Who will give us a place to shelter and something to eat and drink?"

"This is Lord O'Donnell's castle," replied the girl.

"We will be safe here," said her father. "He will look after us well. His family is noble. He treats his guests well."

Lord O'Donnell came forward to greet his guest.

"You are welcome, old man," said Lord O'Donnell. "We are pleased to see you again after so long. We hope you will stay tonight, to join our feast and sing to us about the great deeds of our ancestors."

"I will stay," said the old man. "You are a kind host and look after those who come as guests to your castle."

The young girl led the old man inside the hall.

That evening there was a great celebration in the castle, with a feast, music and dancing.

The Don watched the young men and women as they whirled around the hall.

After everyone had finished eating and drinking Old Michael started to sing and tell stories. He sang a song about the great cattle raids of the

past and songs in praise of Lord O'Donnell's family.

He talked and sang till deep into the night. Everyone listened in silence, enjoying the stories and the songs.

When Old Michael had finished Lord O'Donnell thanked him.

Then everyone went to sleep. They were full of the good things they had eaten. They slept well, dreaming of the great deeds of the heroes who had lived a long, long time before them.



Chapter 10

Winter

The snow started. The fields were white.

No one went out much, except to get more turf from the stack in the yard. Life at Lord O'Donnell's castle was always very slow in the middle of winter.

For the children the Don had some simple magic tricks he had learned in America.

In the evenings, in the flickering light of candles, he entertained people with stories about his adventures. He told them about what had happened to him in America. He described expeditions to the Indian lands with his men. He told them all about the danger he had been in and how he and his men had escaped from the savage Indians.

He also told them about the journeys up the wild rivers and through the high mountains. He described the noisy birds, the strange animals and exotic plants he had seen on his travels. He talked about his army friends and how many of them had died of terrible diseases or Indian attacks.

Everyone listened carefully to all that the Don said, especially Deirdre. She had never met a man like the Don before. But he never said very much about his home in Spain or his family there.

One evening the Don found he could do something special to entertain his hosts. He could amuse people by reading their hands and telling them what was going to happen to them in the future.

Two girls came to the castle to visit Deirdre. One girl had black hair; her name was Eilis. The other girl was fair; her name was Aine.

“Who will we marry?” Aine asked the other girls. Eilis giggled.

“Let’s ask the Don,” she said. “He is from a magical land far, far away from here. Perhaps he will be able to tell us. Come on, Deirdre.”

The three girls went to the Don. He was sitting in a corner of the great hall.

“Don Alvaro, can you tell us who we will marry?” asked Eilis.

The Don looked at the three girls for a moment. He did not smile.

“Give me your hand,” he said to Eilis.

He looked carefully at her hand for a few moments.

“Your husband will be young and tall,” he said. Eilis giggled and covered her face with her hands.

Then the Don turned to the fair-haired girl.

“Give me your hand,” he said to Aine.

He looked carefully at her hand for a few moments.

“Your husband will be much older than you. He will have a big black beard,” he said.

Aine giggled and looked at her friends with shining eyes.

Then Deirdre came to the Don. She stretched out her hand. The Don looked at it. Then he raised his head and looked deeply into Deirdre’s eyes.

“Deirdre, you will marry a man from far across the sea,” he said.

Deirdre looked away from the Don. She hurried out of the hall.

Chapter 11

The Spanish Strangers

One day three strangers came to Lord O'Donnell's castle.

Their leader was a young man, dressed in the uniform of an officer of the King of Spain. Their clothes were badly torn. The young man had a bandage on his head.

"Lord O'Donnell, I am a stranger in your land," he said. "My name is Don Fernando. I am on my way to Scotland with my two companions. I need something to eat and a chance to rest."

"Stranger, you are welcome to my castle," said Lord O'Donnell. "You are welcome to stay here, and to eat, and to rest until you are ready to continue your journey."

"Thank you, Lord O'Donnell," said Don Fernando. "Your name is famous throughout the land for your kindness to strangers."

The old women brought buttermilk to drink, with plates of fresh fruit and oat bread to eat. They set the jugs and plates on the big table in front of the strangers.

After they had eaten Lord O'Donnell asked Don Fernando to tell the story of his adventures.

"Lord O'Donnell, I am a Spanish army officer," he said. "My ship was the *Santa Elena*. It was wrecked on the coast of Sligo. After the shipwreck I hid with my companions in the house of an old woman. Now we are on our way to Scotland. Our friends there will help us get home to Spain."

"I came from Spain to fight in our King's Armada against Elizabeth, Queen of England. After the battle we sailed north to the Shetland Islands. From there we headed towards Ireland. Our ship was wrecked near the high mountains of Sligo. The back of the ship was smashed to pieces by the violence of the storm. A huge wave washed me off the *Santa Elena* into the dark waters of the rough sea.

I swam ashore and found shelter where I could sleep.

The sun was shining and the sky was blue. Birds were singing. The storm had gone.

I stood up and looked around. I could see a long, flat beach. There were fields and trees in the distance. Far away I could see a tall mountain.

"I am alone," I thought. "None of the officers or crew have survived. They must have died in the storm. What am I going to do?"

"Hallo!" I called, but not very loudly.

I listened carefully.

"Hallo! Hallo!" Someone else was shouting. I was not alone.

"Hallo!" I called again, a little louder this time.

Far down the long beach, in the distance, I could see five of my crew from the *Santa Elena*.

We ran towards each other, as fast as we could. We were so happy to find companions we thought had been lost.

Then we decided to climb a little headland at the end of the beach. In the distance we could see a few small cottages with thatched roofs.

"We are hungry," I said. "Perhaps the people there will give us something to eat."

We made our way slowly along the path towards the little village. When we arrived we found it was clean and seemed well looked after. We could not see anyone.

An oak tree and an ash tree grew side by side near the back of the cottages, giving shade and shelter to the houses.

I went closer to one of the cottages. The door was not completely closed.

"Hallo," I called quietly. "Is there anyone there?"

I pushed open the door, then bent my head and went into the kitchen. The room was dark and warm. An old woman was sitting beside the turf fire. Two cats lay on a rough mat near her feet.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Where do you come from? I have never seen you before."

"My name is Don Fernando," I said. "My companions and I are from Spain."

"Well, my name is Peig," said the old woman. "What are you doing here?"

"We were on a great warship," I said. "Our ship was wrecked in the storm."

"Ah, the storm, the storm," said the old woman. "That was a terrible storm. We all thanked God that this house was not badly damaged. Everyone has gone to fix our neighbour's cottage on the other side of the hill. The roof was torn off. It will take them a long time to repair it properly."

"Who else lives here with you?" I asked.

"My son and his wife and their child," said Peig. "They will look after you when they come back. Till then, sit down and rest."

The old woman got to her feet slowly. She put a shining copper pan on the fire. Then she chopped up a green cabbage into small pieces and put it in the pot with some clear water from a big jug. She got some fresh thyme and rosemary, chopped them and put them into the pot with everything else. Last, she added a small piece of smoked pork she lifted off a hook over the fire.

“Now go outside and sit in the sun,” she told us. “You can rest there. I will bring you some soup when it is ready.”

So I sat outside with my companions in the warm sunshine. Soon we were enjoying the delicious smell of soup cooking inside the little house.

When it was ready the old woman brought bowls to us outside. The soup was wonderful. We had not tasted fresh food for weeks.

The old woman came back out again after we had finished.

“My son and his family will not come back until later,” she said. “Now you must rest again. If you want to wash, the stream is down there.”

Then the old woman left us and went back inside her little cottage.

Chapter 12

Some Spaniards Leave Ireland

Later, as the sun was going down over the hills, the old woman's son returned with his wife and child. She explained to them who we were.

“Strangers, you are welcome,” said the old woman's son. “It is a good thing to look after strangers who come asking for help. It is very dangerous for you to stay in Ireland. English soldiers are everywhere, looking for Spanish sailors who escaped the terrible storm. I have heard some have been taken prisoner and killed; or they are being held prisoner until their families pay a great ransom. You are welcome to stay until you have rested and can continue your journey back to Spain.”

That evening we all ate together at a big table in the fresh air. We had a great feast, with eggs and cheese and oatcakes, then sweet plums and big red apples. We even had seaweed to eat; we liked it very much.

The old woman and her family and their friends let us shelter for a few days. They gave us lots of good food to eat and a chance to rest.

Then suddenly one night the English soldiers arrived in the village!

It had been a very warm evening. I was asleep in the fresh air at the back of one of the cottages, on the ground between the oak tree and the ash tree.

I woke up when I heard terrible crashing and shouting. Seven or eight soldiers broke down the door of the old woman's cottage. They found three of my companions and took them prisoner. After they were caught by the soldiers they were taken to a church on a little hill nearby. They were hanged.

Later, after the English soldiers had gone and it was safe to go back to my friends in the village, I went to the church and saw my companions' bodies still hanging there. It was a terrible sight!

I was luckier. I was able to escape and managed to flee into the hills. I hid in a cave for several days, with nothing to eat and nowhere to rest in comfort.

My other two companions also escaped. Like me, they had managed to flee to safety after the English soldiers arrived.

Our friends in the village suffered too. The English soldiers were angry because the old woman and her family had tried to help us. In

revenge they took one of the young men away with them as a prisoner. I do not know what happened to him. I never saw him again.

My companions and I wandered together in the wild country for days; we did not find anywhere to rest. We went on through the hills, hungry and thirsty.

Tired and weary, we prayed for God's help. He has guided us here to the safety of your castle, Lord O'Donnell. We praise God for his great goodness to us.

Now we are on our way to Scotland. From there we want to get home to Spain."

Don Fernando's story was finished.

Everyone sat hushed and quiet in the great hall of Lord O'Donnell.

Then Lord O'Donnell broke the silence.

"Don Fernando, you have told us a marvellous story," he said. "It is a terrible story, too. You have suffered much in the last few months."

"Thank you, Lord O'Donnell," said Don Fernando. "Now I must ask for your help. I am a stranger in a strange land."

"We have another Spanish officer here," said Lord O'Donnell, turning towards the place where Don Alvaro was.

Don Alvaro came forward from the dark corner of the hall where he had been sitting quietly.

The two Spanish officers greeted each other warmly.

“Don Alvaro, you must come with me to Scotland,” said Don Fernando. “We will be safer if we travel together.”

“No, I want to stay here,” said Don Alvaro. “You can go without me, Don Fernando. Lord O’Donnell has many friends in the countryside who will help you and your companions to get to Scotland safely. You will find good friends there who will help you get home to Spain.”

Don Fernando and his two companions left soon afterwards on their dangerous journey back to Spain.

Don Alvaro was alone again in Lord O’Donnell’s castle.

Chapter 13

Spring and More Decisions

It was a long, miserable winter but the spring came at last.

Everyone was very busy around the castle. There was a lot of work on the farm. Some of the young men took Lord O’Donnell’s cattle to their summer pastures in the hills.

“Don Alvaro, it is safe for you to leave if you wish,” said Lord O’Donnell. “The roads to Scotland are clear now. The English soldiers have gone. You will find friends who can take you safely to Scotland. From there you will be able to get back safely to Spain.”

“Lord O’Donnell, you and your people have been very kind to me,” said the Don. “You have given me food and drink and shelter. You have hidden me from the English and kept me safe. But I do not want to leave. I want to stay here and marry your daughter. Deirdre and I love each other. I am now a poor man. I do not have land here, or a fine house, or lots of servants. All I have is this fine gold chain which my mother

gave me before our King's fleet sailed from Spain."

Lord O'Donnell laughed aloud.

"Don, you are welcome to stay and marry Deirdre," he said. "You can live here and the two of you can look after me in my old age."

The holy man from Ards came to carry out the ceremony. He was an old man with long black hair. All the people loved him for his wisdom and holiness. He blessed the happy couple and prayed for their safety and happiness.

After the marriage ceremony there was music and dancing. There was a great party in the castle. The servants prepared a feast for all the guests. Sheep and fat pigs were killed and roasted on a huge fire out in the yard.

Old Michael and his daughter came back to join in the celebrations. He sang, played music and told his stories of the heroes of the old days.

"Music is a wonderful thing, Don Alvaro," said Lord O'Donnell. "It makes even the saddest person happy. Is it not wonderful, how a piece of sheep gut can make the heart rejoice?"

The party continued until late into the night.

"Don, we are glad you have decided to stay," said Lord O'Donnell. "This is your home now."

Chapter 14

Living in Ireland

When he was an old man the Don lived at the castle with his wife Deirdre.

He often went for a walk with his dog in the evening when the weather was fine. Sometimes he went alone; sometimes he went with one of his grandchildren. He carried a strong walking stick to help him over the rough ground.

One evening, more than forty years after the shipwreck, the Don went along the shore. Tom, his oldest grandson, and his dog were with him. They walked slowly past the old man's cottage, where the Don had slept on his first night in Ireland.

The old man was dead now. No one else had come to live in the cottage. It was deserted. The roof had fallen in. The walls had started to crumble and a few great stones lay on the ground. Grass and brambles grew round the door where white roses used to grow so thickly. A young oak tree had sprung up and was growing close to the door.

From the cottage at one end of the beach the Don climbed to the top of the little headland at the other end. It was where Lord O'Donnell had been buried, close to his ancestors. There the Don sat and looked out across the open sea. A light breeze blew from the Atlantic. He watched little fishing boats bobbing gently on the sparkling water of the sea.

A few gulls circled high over the water in the late evening air. Sometimes they dived into the water for small fish.

Young Tom and the dog sat on the grass near the old man.

"This is the most beautiful place in the whole world," said the Don quietly to Tom. "Surely no place on earth is better than the place that a man can call his home?"

The Don remembered all the years he had lived happily in Ireland.

He knew that he too would be buried on the headland in a grave beside Lord O'Donnell.

He thought of Spain in silence, remembering his parents, and his brother, and his sisters, and the place where he had been born. He held his mother's gold chain in his right hand and looked at it closely.

When the sun went down and it got colder the Don stood up. He climbed down to the bottom of the little headland. Tom and the dog followed him.

The moon cast its silver light over the land and sea.

The Don walked back slowly along the smooth beach ... back to the castle, back to Deirdre and his family at home ...

So ends the story of the Don of Donegal.



Chapter 15

After the Don

The Don remained in Ireland. He lived till he was more than seventy years old. He and Deirdre had seven children - three boys and four girls.

In time their children married and lived with their families in different parts of Donegal.

Today many families in Donegal and Sligo say that their ancestors are descendants of Spanish soldiers and sailors who were wrecked after the Spanish Armada.

If your name is Algeo, Cahar, Gillea, Gillen, Martin or McCaffrey you may be one of them.

The Ulster Museum in Belfast and other museums in Ireland have lots of treasure and tools and sailors' equipment which divers have brought up from the ships of the Spanish Armada. Perhaps they belonged to one of your ancestors.

We will never know how many Spanish soldiers and sailors were shipwrecked in the terrible storms off the coast of Ireland.

Some of them were rich officers from important families; others were poor soldiers and sailors. Many were drowned in the terrible storms or died in the shipwrecks. Others were captured by the English soldiers who came to search for them. Some escaped from Ireland to Scotland and eventually got back home to Spain.

But a few of the Spanish soldiers and sailors stayed in Ireland and settled down. They married local girls and had children, and then grandchildren.

The Don of Donegal was one of them.