



HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: Ana De Armas, right, grew up in poverty in this modest apartment block outside Havana. Above: One of the simple bedrooms in the flat

From **Richard Simpson**
and **Eugene Costello**

IN HAVANA

AS THE latest Bond girl, she will be filming in the most exclusive and glamorous locations around the world.

But life started very differently for Ana De Armas, who grew up in a tatty breeze-block apartment building on a rubble-strewn street in Cuba.

As a teenager, Ana fled the humble flat in the distillery town of Santa Cruz del Norte – an hour's drive east of the capital, Havana – to follow her seemingly impossible dream of escaping its grinding poverty through acting.

But now, at 31, all her ambitions have come to fruition after Daniel Craig personally picked her out to play his love interest Paloma in the latest, still untitled 007 blockbuster.

Her parents Ana and Ramon, who was a teacher and part-time oil-refinery worker, no longer live in the simple home, but the current occupants showed The Mail on Sunday around the small kitchen, living room and bedrooms, including Ana's, which was painted pink.

In this remote town, there is no access to television, the internet or newspapers

'She was pretty and smart – a young girl in a hurry'

and the streets outside the apartment block are occupied by stray dogs.

Neighbours who spoke to The Mail on Sunday remember an intelligent, driven young woman. Ibrahim Rangel, 72, who worked with Ramon at the refinery, said: 'Ana was a very pretty girl. Very intelligent. Basically, she was a young girl in a hurry. But we never expected her to be a Hollywood actress.'

Ana enrolled at the Escuela Nacional de Teatro, the national theatre school, in 2002, when she was 14. One of her classmates, Claudia Albarino, described her as 'likeable, popular and very kind' and said she had worked hard.

But the college's director, Professor Corina Mestre Violably, revealed that she quit before completing the course to land her first acting role in a Spanish television series, El Internado.

Ana has acknowledged that her success only came because she made the decision to leave her home country, where an estimated 11 million people – a quarter of the population – live in poverty, and where the even the maximum

From Cuba with love... new Bond girl Ana's epic rags to riches rise

daily wage, set by the communist state, is just £1. By leaving Cuba, she also avoided national service, which can be military or dedicated to volunteering.

Her departure was only possible as one set of grandparents is Spanish, and in one interview, she described her potential future if she chose to stay in Cuba.

'I had there, in front of my eyes, former students of the school – graduates – who were not working or who didn't have any money because they had to perform social service,' she recalled.

'I would turn on the television and see nothing more than old reruns of soap operas or things produced by ICRT [the Cuban broadcaster] that were of poor-quality due to the low budgets.'

'I was fortunate enough to also have Spanish nationality, and with that freedom I could come to Spain. I don't know

what I would have done if I hadn't had this advantage.'

She has also been blessed with enviable looks. Her career to date has involved appearing naked in the Spanish language films Sex, Party And Lies and Blind Alley. In the 2015 movie Knock Knock, she tempts Keanu Reeves into a steamy threesome, and she also appears naked in 2017 film Blade Runner 2049.

Last year, she shot the crime drama Knives Out, where she met Craig, and impressed him enough to land the part in the new Bond film that has taken her so far from a past she seems keen to forget.

Indeed, one family friend, Josefa Rodrigues, said that when she asked Ana's mother about her daughter, she received a lawyer's missive forbidding her from discussing them. 'I was shocked,' she said. 'I had considered them friends.'



GETTY / RICHARD SIMPSON



ICONIC: Yeoman Warders take part in ceremonial duties

Now the Tower's hungry for Beefeaters

By **Mark Nicol**

IT MAY have successfully averted disaster by rearing four new raven chicks, but the Tower of London now has another shortage to tackle – a lack of Beefeaters.

A fresh intake of Yeoman Warders, as the famous guards are officially called, is needed but recruitment has been stymied by applicants needing to have served in the Armed Forces for at least 22 years and to have been

awarded a medal for good conduct. In response, Historic Royal Palaces – which runs the Tower of London and other sites such as Hampton Court Palace and Kensington Palace – has taken out advertisements for Beefeaters in military magazines and online. Explaining that the

successful applicants will earn about £30,000 for a 36-hour working week, the advert says: 'As part of the Yeoman Body, your main responsibilities will include ensuring that all our visitors receive a Royal Welcome... [and] contributing to the safety and security of the Tower and taking part in ceremonial duties and parades.'

The recruitment drive, which will

bring Beefeater numbers up to 37, comes shortly after the first birth of ravens inside the Tower for 30 years.

According to a centuries-old prophecy, the Tower walls will crumble without ravens nesting there. Two breeding ravens, Huginn and Muninn, were brought to a new aviary at the Tower last year. The new chicks began hatching on April 23, St George's Day.