

Bad Girls' Nicole Faraday talks about the problems of playing a killer porn star. By Jane Ridley

When Nicole Faraday hit the big time in *Bad Girls*, nobody prepared her for all the interest her character would generate. As ex-porn star Snowball Merriman, who is banged up in Larkhall for murder, she has been bombarded by letters, mainly from adoring males. But not all of her fanmail has been welcome.

"One letter wasn't exactly pervy, but it left me wondering," says Nicole, 26, who's currently starring in the fifth series of the prison drama. "He said it would be his dream if I'd carry him on my shoulders for a charity event, like a three-mile run."

"He said he was 35, 5ft 10ins tall and weighed 11st, and that we could meet at any time, at any place, at my convenience. He'd obviously got the whole scenario worked out in his head."

"Then, as an afterthought, he wrote, 'If your boyfriend has a problem with this, perhaps we could have some fun along the same line'. It was hilarious. I thought, 'Along the same line as me carrying you on my shoulders? I don't think so!'"

Another strange request was an invitation to open a "Cowboys and Indians museum" which a fan had set up in his shed. And Nicole was once followed around her neighbourhood of Greenwich, South London, by a woman who finally plucked up the courage to ask her to pose for a photograph with her daughter.

"I was really flattered," she recalls. "But then the woman said, 'Great, we can get £50 from that showbiz magazine now'. It turns out they pay people who send in pictures of themselves with celebrities. It brought me down to earth with a bump."

Despite such blips, Nicole loves her work and is grateful to have made it after years of trying. She previously sang in an Abba tribute band and had minor roles in the sitcoms *Orrible* and *Time Gentlemen Please*. She once even handed out promotional leaflets at *The Motor Show*.

"I got very frustrated because I was

"My boyfriend finds Snowball scary. He prefers me"



STICK 'EM UP: Snowball holds Karen hostage

always auditioning for the same parts," says Nicole. "It was always a lap dancer, prostitute or dizzy blonde girlfriend. There aren't many meaty roles for women who look like me. I've even been told I'd be better off in America."

Her luck changed in the summer of 2001. A *Bad Girls* casting agent saw her in a comedy at London's Soho Theatre and she landed the role of the beautiful but manipulative Snowball.

"Unlike the blonde stereotype, Snowball is tough and intelligent," says Nicole, who was also *Casualty's* flirty Dr Heather Lincoln. "The lecherous guard Jim Fenner falls for the act hook, line and sinker, but all she cares about is breaking out of jail and being reunited with her boyfriend, Ritchie."

Nicole herself has been with actor Dean Lepley, 37, for six years. They met through mutual friends after he appeared onstage in her hometown of Poole, Dorset.

"It can be difficult," she says. "Once I didn't see Dean for five months because I was touring in a play. But we both understand the pressures and we're not tied to permanent jobs."

So what does Dean make of the scheming Snowball?

"He definitely prefers me," she grins. "He finds Snowball quite scary. Considering that in a drug-fuelled rage she stabbed someone 17 times, I'd like to think I don't lose my temper that much."

Snowball, who once blew up part of the prison, is back up to her old tricks. This week she pulls a gun on governor Karen Betts (Claire King) in another attempt to escape.

"She's in for a rough ride and loses a lot of privileges, including her right to wear make-up," says Nicole. "She's barely recognisable because she looks so dowdy. I hate her clothes, especially that disgusting, stripy silk blouse, which I wouldn't be seen dead in. But it's a lovely drama to be part of. I'm proud to have done my time at Larkhall."

● *Bad Girls*, Thursday, ITV1, 9pm.

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