

JOHN

*Excerpt from Chapter Six*

'Hello,' says John. The oriental checkout girl smiles and says hello.

'Beep, beep,' goes the bar code scanner.

'They should make longlife white bread,' says John.

The oriental checkout girl smiles a polite smile.

'Beep,' goes the scanner.

'You know, like they make longlife milk.'

'Beep. Beep.'

'Have you been in this country long?'

'I was born here,' says the oriental checkout girl.

'You look like Mutya – Mutya Buena.'

The oriental checkout girl smiles again, but weaker than before.

'Beep.'

There is a cough behind him. A queue is beginning to form. John looks at the woman who coughed, she looks away. He turns back to the checkout girl.

'Beep, beep.' And that's his last item, the haemorrhoid cream. It's now or never.

'You know Mutya Buena, the Far Eastern looking Sugababe – er ex Sugababe. You look like her,' he hesitates for a moment, 'but you haven't got the stud in the lip.' He laughs.

He can hear mutterings from the queue behind him.

The checkout girl has pressed a red button on her workstation.

'I think she was the best ever Sugababe. The best.' John smiles.

The checkout girl does not smile back.

'What time do you finish work? I'll come back when you finish. We can go for a drink. Push the button.' He laughs again; mimes pushing a button with his thumb.

'Is there a problem here?' A black security guard appears by John's side.

John turns slightly, then turns back to the checkout girl.

'Excuse me sir, there is a long queue can you move along please.'

'I'm talking. We're talking.' John stammers.

'Come on now sir, please move along.'

'Can't you see we're talking?' John declares angrily.

A hand grips his shoulder.

'Get off me.' John exclaims.

A hand grabs his wrist. 'Now sir, please come with me.'

John struggles, tries to free himself. 'No!' he shouts. John is looking up at the checkout girl's horrified face as his head is pushed onto the counter. His arm is twisted around his back.

John is thinking, as his cheek is being pressed further and further into the cold stainless steel, that he probably won't be having a date with her after all.