

Margaret Johnson is at an appointment with her General Practitioner at a medical practice in Ruralham.

“Well, Ms Johnson, I think that you might have one or more gallstones. To make sure I would like you to go as an outpatient for an ultrasound scan - you can choose to go to the special clinic at the Ruralshire Acute Hospital at Eaglechester or you can go to Ruralham Community Hospital, as you choose.”

The doctor explains that at Ruralham Community Hospital there is not a special clinic and that the tests are done at a clinic for which only its main purpose is signposted and so could possibly lead to gossip if someone she knows sees her going in.

“Well, it’s closer, so I’ll go to Ruralham Community Hospital please.”

“Right. Is eleven o’clock next Tuesday morning alright?”

“Yes, fine.”

Tuesday.

Margaret Johnson is leaving the examination room after the ultrasound scan.

She walks back through the waiting area and sees, and is seen by, the daughter of the gossip who lives three doors away. The daughter got married just over a year ago and moved away.

‘Oh no’, thinks Margaret, but neither speak.

Margaret has just arrived back home.

Margaret could have gone to the hospital in work time, but chose to book a day of holiday to avoid questions and so as not to need to go into work afterwards.

‘A light lunch and a lie down to relax after the nervous excitement of it all’, thinks Margaret.

Wednesday morning.

Margaret is about to get in her car to go to work.

She notices the gossip three doors away and the gossip’s neighbour talking over the fence, looking at her.

Margaret gets into her car and drives to work.

Margaret arrives at the staff car park at the supermarket.

Margaret feels that a few people are watching her. Surely the gossiping has not got here.

'It's none of their business. I've no need to explain. I'm not going to explain. Am I imagining it?'

Margaret enters the supermarket.

People, staff and shoppers, look her way and burst into applause.

"Congratulations", says the store manager.

Margaret is about to shout out in protest.

"Arts Magazine has named you as their Fashion Celebrity of the Month. The newspapers have picked it up and you are on the front page of most of them. Head Office is delighted, they want you to go to Paris for some photographs of the Autumn Collection. By the Eiffel Tower, by the pyramid, dinner on a boat on the Seine, that sort of thing. I've put a pristine copy of each newspaper from the centre of the pile in the office for you as a gift, and another set for the Museum of Local Life. Most months the Arts Magazine Fashion Celebrity of the Month gets a mention on an inside page as it is usually just someone from show business, sort of having their turn, but you are the first one from outside of show business, so they've given you star billing."

Margaret is amazed.

"You don't have to go to Paris, but it's all expenses paid, fly, train or ferry as you wish, you'll have a support team with you and you can take a companion of your choice - you don't need to decide now, think about it for a few days."

Evening.

Margaret is at home.

Margaret has been looking at the newspapers and has now stored them away to keep them clean.

'Should I or shouldn't I?' thinks Margaret.

Margaret decides to make no decision yet, but to sleep on it.

'Maybe seek advice. Who can I ask? If I go, will I regret it? If I don't go, would I regret that? If I go, who should I take as a companion?'

Margaret tries to watch television, but cannot relax.

Margaret decides to have an early night and goes to bed.