

Mrs Duffy

“Oi, watch it! Cheeky blighters. You’d think they never saw someone dressed smartly. Well, it’s my idea of smart and most of it I’ve made myself. OK, I admit it. I’ve adapted other people’s clothes but, in a way, they are my design.

Go on, have another look. Take some time over it and what do you see? Some beautiful woman dressed eccentrically? Well, I was beautiful once, many moons ago but I always did attract attention by the way I dressed. The patterns don’t match, they would tell me or the colours are all wrong. What makes them perfect fashion advisors?

Now, who do I remind you of? No, it’s not Coco Chanel. You’re almost there, No, not the latest designer for Marks & Spencer. Do I look like an M&S customer? Well, I’ll tell you who my idol is, Vivienne Westwood, God rest her soul. I think I could have been a designer or even one of her models in my younger days. Just look at the style I have today!

See these beads? Picked them up in a boot sale. A nice young man had to clear out his granny’s house and came across all her jewellery. He had no idea what they were worth so I offered him a fiver for six strands of pearls. He was glad to make a sale and I scarpered before his partner returned and discovered he had sold the Cartier necklace for next to nothing.

And my gloves? Now I did work on those. I wanted fingerless gloves and, now I’ve added the felt and beads at the wrist, I think they look very stylish. What do you think of my brocade bag? I made it from a bodice which didn’t really suit me, so I took some of the material, wrapped it around my waist and attached my bag to it. Stylish, eh? It’s the leather strap which makes it look designer.

No, I know it doesn’t go with the skirt and top. But it’s not supposed to. Don’t you know anything about fashion? The more garish and gaudy the outfit, the more up to date it becomes. I thought I ought to add a little blazer as I do feel the cold now. I call it a blazer because

only old ladies wear cardigans, whatever the fabric. But this is made of a beautiful tapestry. They were once hanging up at the windows of that big mansion at the top of the hill. You see, I told you I could adapt anything.

By the way, you must have noticed my hat. Where do you think that came from? You'll never guess. It was a lampshade. Well, I saw it in a skip so just helped myself. After all, I look on it as a community service, keeping things out of landfill. I didn't like the horrible beige colour though – even I have standards and beige is not part of my colour scheme. Anyone who wears beige at my age becomes invisible. A touch of fabric paint, some bright red ribbons to make it special, and my outfit is complete.

I can design something for you if you like. I won't charge any fancy prices but I could do a similar outfit for you. Oh, you're not interested then. Don't walk away. We were just getting to know each other. What was your name?

So rude, walking off like that. We could have been very good friends. Oh, not to worry. Here's someone else who can't stop staring. Hello, are you admiring my outfit? I can tell you how to get one for yourself for next to nothing."

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