

STEAM IT UP

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The mountain of clothing in Marian's room tipped over and crashed against the window. An expletive almost escaped her lips, but she remembered the neighbour's children were just outside her door, playing with her robotic cat.

"That's it," she declared. "I can't keep working like this. I can't even find my sewing machine and my client is going to want her costume by the afternoon."

She finally found her sewing machine and pushed its trolley out into the living room. She looked up as Bluebell hopped through the open window, then landed on the ground with a thud.

"Be careful! You're not as young as you once were."

"Whirrr," said Bluebell, in her mechanical purring sound. "Whirrr, rattle rattle."

She clunked over to her small kitty bed, its blanket printed with cogs and gears.

"I'll have Thomas oil you when he arrives. But now, I must finish this steampunk gown and fascinator for Carie."

She spent the next two hours focussing her attention on Carie's elaborate costume, made of shiny brown satin, white lace, and so many cogs and gears that she had lost count.

Finally, the costume was done. Marianne placed it beside the brown lace parasol in the costume box. She laid the fascinator beside it.

"Don't forget the gloves and the goggles!" She collected them from the shelf above her, then placed them in the box and closed it. The entire box was secured with a gigantic pink satin ribbon and faux rose.

“Hey, don’t you lock your door?” called out Tom, as he entered the room. She turned to look at him. “And don’t you knock?” she bantered back at him.

“Nope,” he replied jokingly.

“It was only unlocked for a few hours. I let Bluebell out to play with the neighbour’s children.”

“Oh, you mean that robot, fairy, and pirate I saw out there?”

She nodded.

He peered into her bedroom. “Whoah. Was there an earthquake or something?”

She walked over and looked in, remembering that she should be annoyed.

“I’m just so busy. I finished this one job. Now I have two more dresses to finish today.”

Tom strode into the bedroom. “Say no more. I shall tidy up for you.”

She ran after him. “But...” she started to say, but changed her mind and backed off.

“Relax,” he said. “I’m going to organize by type, and then by colour.”

She nodded, relieved. “I might actually be able to find what I need after this.” She left him to it.

She longingly thought about having her own store. She thought about what she’d call it. “Steampunk R Us. No. Steampunk Is It. Nope. Steampunk Clothing & Accessories. Nope, too boring.”

The doorbell went off. She quickly grabbed Carie’s box and went to open the door. It took some effort to send her client on her way. After all, she wanted to finish the next two dresses, but she didn’t want to offend her client.

“I’m going to love it! I love all your work.” But fortunately, Carie was understanding and quickly left.

Relieved, Marianne closed and actually remembered to flip the brass deadbolt on her door.

She sat down at her old black Singer sewing machine. She quickly added more machine oil as it had been trying to jam up on her earlier. She usually took the whole thing apart at least once every new season, but she’d been so busy with her steampunk clothing business she just didn’t have time.

And she longingly thought about what to do with her business. She couldn’t keep running it out of her home, and yet, she didn’t think she would make enough to cover the rental of an actual storefront. But if she did have a storefront, she’d likely get more business. But did she have time for that? She did source

accessories from others, as long as they lived up to the quality she expected. And she could take commissions from other artists too.

She managed to finish up the rest of her orders for the day. She peered into the bedroom but poor Thomas had gotten so tired that he'd collapsed on her bed, with Bluebell resting on top of him.

Bluebell was constructed of brass and copper, but she had a faux fur head with ears, and plastic whiskers. One day Marianne would finish making her an outfit so that Bluebell looked more like a cat. But she had no time to do it!

Marianne threw something together for dinner. Fortunately, Thomas didn't complain. He ate the cheese, crackers, and salad, with store-bought pie. If he wanted home cooked meals, he'd have to find another girlfriend.

"Say, why don't you show me how to sew?" he asked her the next day.

"I thought you weren't interested?" she asked him, holding her scissors in the air so she didn't make a mistake cutting the faux leather.

"It's growing on me. Besides, I could help you out. And poor Bluebell, she really needs a fur coat."

Bluebell looked up at him and whirred. He'd oiled her earlier that day so she was limber and spry again.

"Sure." But Marianne felt dread. Another thing to add to her list.

Thomas looked at her sadly, realizing his mistake.

"What about the family business?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm just there working. When I'm off, I'm off. Not like you." He took a sip of his ale.

She nodded. "It's always work for me."

"Oh, I did have an idea for your business," he said.

She looked up curiously at him.

"Steam Punk It." He smiled.

She dropped her scissors. "I love it! It's perfect!"

"Yes, and it shall be steampunkit.net online."

She picked up her scissors but paused. "What? Online?"

"Yes, you know there's this thing called the internet."

She shrugged. "I have no time for digital things. I work in the real world."

"Oh, I know, but you could set up an online shop. No need to manage a real store. You could still work from home and save money."

She carefully cut through the faux leather piece to make steampunk gloves.

"Perhaps you're right. How does it work?"

He reached down to pet Bluebell. “I can take photographs of your clothing or the steampunk accessories you’d like to sell. I post them online with descriptions, such as steampunk pirate gear, or steampunk princess, or steampunk captain. You build up the store’s reputation, then make money on what customers purchase. You package up the items and ship them out from the post office, which is just down the street. Simple!”

“I’ll think about it,” she said, grimacing. She’d really wanted to find a way to make a real shopfront work.

Later that day she looked at Bluebell. This kitty really needed to look more like a kitty. But she had twelve orders in her queue that she needed to finish up. And some of them involved visiting the local post office to have them shipped.

Just what was wrong with telephone orders anyway? She felt the internet was rather impersonal.

She placed a pair of brown leather boots with huge brass buckles into a box. These were a bestseller, though she didn’t make them. She sourced them from elsewhere, knowing that her talents lay in dressmaking rather than accessories.

Sometimes she provided a little bit extra in her orders. She opened up a brown lacquered box and slid the drawer out. Inside was an assortment of steampunk brass jewellery. Rings, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and brooches. There were even old watches which still worked.

She carefully chose one of the old pocket watches and wrapped it up, then placed it inside the box.

“There, that’s done.” She proudly looked at the boxes stacked by the door, ready for curbside pickup, with a few ready for shipping via post office the next day.

“I promise I’ll make you an outfit, tomorrow,” she said, stroking Bluebell’s furry ears. The robot thought nothing of it, not really caring either way whether she looked like a cat or not.

Marianne had managed to catch up on all her orders. Tomorrow would be a better day.

But the next morning, she had telephone calls and texts from many of her current customers. There was to be a big steampunk fair and convention in a month, and they all needed something to steampunk it!

“Oh, perhaps Thomas is right. Having items ready for sale online might be a good idea. With all price points.”

She hurriedly got to work. As per usual, Thomas showed up mid-afternoon.

“I have something to show you,” he said. “Now, I know you don’t like me doing things without your permission, but check it out. If you don’t like it, I can delete.” He moved his tablet in front of her face, blocking her view from the steampunk coat she was working on.

Steampunkit.net it said at the top of the screen, with photos of wonderful clothing and descriptions.

She stopped what she was doing to have a look. “Oh, fabulous!” she said, taking the tablet from him.

He was surprised, thinking she’d nix his idea.

“Say, are these all for sale?” she asked him.

“Yes, it’s called affiliate marketing.”

“Perfect, because there’s this steampunk faire and convention coming up and I can’t possibly make outfits for everybody. I think I might steer some people to my site.”

“Great,” he said, tapping the screen. “The site is now live.”

“Now I can make Bluebell her costume.” Marianne gave him a kiss, then reached for the faux fur to make Bluebell look more like a cat.

“Let’s steam it up.” He picked out materials to make the cat some goggles.

The End.

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