

## **The Maker Lady: Steve Fuger**

Steve is packing her gear: it's a perfect day for it, weatherwise, should bring out the crowds. Spare nozzles for the pump, extra couple of bags of modelling balloons, wishful thinking perhaps, but you never know, daren't run out of those.

Some business cards tucked into her waistcoat pocket: someone might just ask about a children's party or entertaining at a wedding reception, or whatever.

She fills a 2-litre bottle of water, and tucks everything into the bag that she'll hang on her trolley.

And as ever she makes herself a robust sandwich, though more as a talismanic insurance than nourishment: if it's a good day, and the coins trickle steadily into her basket, she won't have time to attack it; but if she doesn't pack one, sod's law the takings will be meagre, and she'll wish she had, if only to help the hours pass.

In her colourful skirts, tinkling bells, silver stars on her clogs and her grey hair in plaits, she presents as an unorthodox granny character that the children gravitate to.

On a perfect day, standing there on her usual corner in the shade of her big umbrella, making people laugh as their children challenge her with requests for ever more complicated balloon models, or even on days when the donations aren't that generous, so far as work satisfaction goes, this beats all the so-called proper jobs she's had throughout her working life.

Tourists are her mainstay, but she has also built up a reputation among the local children and their parents who come into town for the weekly shop. You might even call them her clientele, to the extent that she is admonished if she's had a paying engagement elsewhere: 'Where were you last week?' laments one father. 'I can't tell you how much trouble I was in. I promised them a balloon each and you weren't here!'

'But I have to tell you,' he adds, as his daughters make their momentous decisions, 'I overheard them in the garden this week, talking about what they'd like to be when they grow up: they both decided they'd like to be the Maker Lady.'

'The Maker Lady?' she repeats, with a puzzled question mark.

He leans in conspiratorially but grinning: 'They call you the Maker Lady.'

'Oh,' she laughs, 'I'm so sorry,' and to herself she thinks fame doesn't get any better than that.