

The Bicycle Doctor

Linh is nine. The sign above the stall says her uncle's name. For one afternoon, it may as well have said hers.

6 min read

Before you read

- **workshop** — a place where things are made or mended
- **puncture** — a small hole that lets the air out
- **spanner** — a tool for turning nuts and bolts
- **customer** — a person who pays for a service
- **patch** — a small piece used to cover a hole
- **rust** — the rough red-brown coating on old metal



Uncle Tam's bicycle workshop on a narrow street in Hoi An

¹ On a narrow yellow street in Hoi An, in central Vietnam, there is a bicycle workshop no wider than a doorway. Uncle Tam has mended bicycles there for twenty years. Tourists hire bicycles to ride out to the rice fields, and tyres meet nails, so Uncle Tam is never short of work.

² His niece Linh is nine years old. After school she sits on an upturned crate and watches. She has watched so often that she knows the order of the job by heart: take the wheel off, lift the tyre with the levers, pull out the inner tube, pump a little air in, listen for the hiss.

³ "The tube tells you where the hole is," Uncle Tam says. "You only have to be quiet enough to hear it."

⁴ Then comes the rough patch of sandpaper, the glue, the patch pressed down hard with a thumb, and the long wait while it dries. Linh is good at the hearing. She is less good at the waiting.



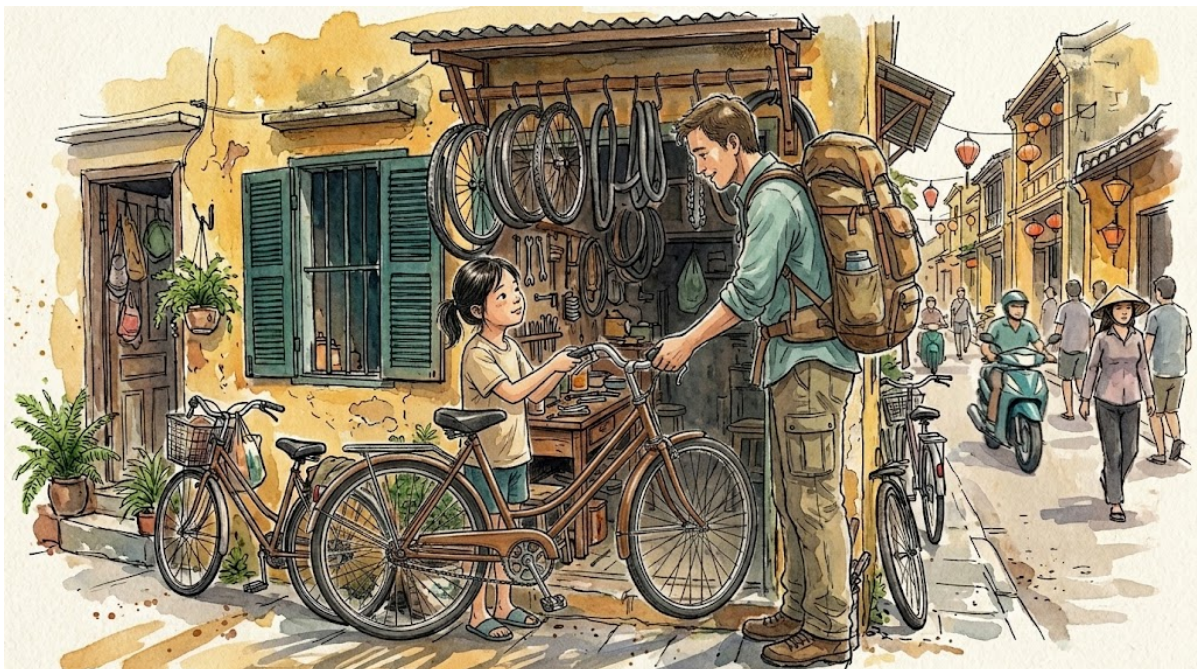
Linh finding the puncture by listening for the hiss of escaping air

⁵ One Thursday Uncle Tam was unwell and stayed at the back of the workshop with a blanket over his knees. At four o'clock a tall man wheeled in a hired bicycle with a flat back tyre. He had a bus to catch at five.

⁶ Linh looked at her uncle. Her uncle looked back at her and did not move.

⁷ So she took the wheel off. Her hands were not strong enough for the last nut and she had to use both arms on the spanner, but it turned. She lifted the tyre, pulled out the tube, pumped in a little air, and held it against her ear.

⁸ Hiss. There it was, near the valve, where the rust had worn the rubber thin. She sanded it, glued it, pressed the patch down with her thumb and counted slowly to one hundred and twenty while it dried.



Linh handing the mended bicycle back to the customer

⁹ The man paid, thanked her, and rode off towards the bus station.

¹⁰ Uncle Tam did not say well done. He said, "You counted to one hundred and twenty. Last month you would have counted to forty." Then he went back to sleep, and Linh swept the floor, smiling.

Part A Choose the best answer

Circle the letter next to the right answer.

1. Where is Uncle Tam's workshop?

- A In Hanoi
- B In Hoi An, Vietnam
- C In Bangkok
- D Beside the bus station

2. How does Linh find a puncture?

- A She looks for a nail
- B She fills the tube with water
- C She listens for the hiss of escaping air
- D She asks her uncle

3. Why did Linh do the repair herself that Thursday?

- A Her uncle was unwell
- B Her uncle was out
- C She wanted the money
- D The customer asked for her

4. What had worn the rubber thin near the valve?

- A A nail
- B Rust
- C The sandpaper
- D The glue

Part B Write your answer

Answer in two or three full sentences.

5. Uncle Tam says, "You only have to be quiet enough to hear it." Explain what he means, and why that advice is useful.

6. Linh had to use both arms to turn the spanner. Why did the writer include this small detail?

Part C**Think deeper**

There is no single right answer here. Say what you think, and say why.

7. At the end, Uncle Tam praises her counting rather than her repair. Why do you think he chose that? What in the story makes you think so?

8. Linh learned by watching the same job over and over. What is something you have learned mostly by watching someone else? How did you know when you were ready to try it yourself?

Answer key

For parents and teachers

Part A

1. B — in Hoi An, Vietnam | 2. C — she listens for the hiss of escaping air | 3. A — her uncle was unwell | 4. B — rust

Part B

5. The escaping air makes a sound that shows where the hole is, so you do not have to search the whole tube — you just have to stop and listen carefully. Accept any answer explaining that paying attention saves time or finds the problem.

6. It shows the job was genuinely hard for her and that she is still small, which makes finishing it more impressive. Accept: to show she struggled, to show she did not give up.

Part C

These answers vary. Mark the reasoning, not the answer.

7. A strong answer notices that waiting was the part she was bad at — the text says so earlier — so counting to one hundred and twenty is the thing that actually improved. A weaker answer says he was just being kind. Prompt with: what did the story say she was not good at?

8. Any honest personal answer counts, as long as it gives a reason. The skill being practised is noticing evidence of one's own readiness.

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