TUNTONA AND TUNTUNI

(Bangladeshi folktale narrated by Husne Jahan)

এক যে ছিল টোনা আর এক যে ছিল টুনি

গাছের ডালে বসে তারা করত কানাকানি

There was a tona and there was a Tuni

Chirped every morning, sitting on a tree.

Tuntuni is a bird in Bangladesh and it is called 'tailor bird' in English. There are many tales in Bangladesh about the intelligence of this little bird. Here is a tale about this tailor bird of Bangladesh. We shall call the male and female birds Tona and Tuni.

A TunTona bird and his partner TunTuni whom we shall call Tona and Tuni, lived in their nest on the branches of a tree near a farmer's house in a village. Every morning they came out of their nest and flew to the farmer's house and his rice and lentil fields to peck and eat crops and grains.

One day Tona told Tuni, " Everyday I see the farmer's wife makes very lovely cakes (pithas) and I can only peck at their tiny pieces thrown here and there in their yard. They are really very very tasty. I like them a lot. Can you make some cakes like those so that we eat as much as we like?

Tuni replied, "Yes, I have also tasted them. They are really very tasty. But how can I make them? We shall need a lot of things to make those cakes. "

Tona was very eager to eat those cakes. So, he said, " If you tell me what you need, I shall try to bring them from somewhere."

Tuni tried to think about things needed to make the cakes. The first thing they would need is rice flour. Then they would need some molasses (brown sugar) and water; then an earthen pot to cook the cakes in. After that they would need some dry wooden sticks and finally, some match sticks to light a fire.

When Tuni told Tona about all those things needed to make the cakes, Tona knew it would not be easy to get the things. But he was so eager to have the cakes, that he told Tuni, " Don't worry, I shall try my best to get those things one by one and then you can make the cakes."

Tona and Tuni woke up and flew out very early in the morning to pick those things before the farmer and other people got up from their sleep. First, they went to collect a small pot from the potter's house when the potter was still asleep. Then he and Tuni started picking rice flour from the farmer's storage. They collected the things slowly for a few days as they could only carry small amounts each time.

After they collected the pot and the rice flour, they went to pick some small sticks from the forest. They flew to the forest and started picking small dry pieces of fallen branches of trees. A tiger who lived in that part of the forest was also searching for animals to eat for his meal. When the tiger who was the king of the forest, heard noises made by Tona and Tuni under the trees near him, he growled loudly, " Who are you entering my kingdom in the forest? "

Tona and Tuni jumped with fear by hearing the tiger's voice. They did not reply to the tiger's question, but remained very very quiet. The tiger howled again and repeated his question, "Who are you disturbing my forest?" Then Tona replied timidly in a very soft voice, " My Lord, the King of the jungle, it is me, a little bird Tona bird." The tiger felt very happy and became more hungry thinking about  eating the bird. So, he ordered in a loud voice, " Come out quickly in front of me and tell me what you are doing in my jungle kingdom. "

Tona whispered very softly with fear, " My Lord, the King of the jungle, we want to have some rice cake and we need some wood to light a fire to make it. So, I came to pick some fallen dry leaves and branches of the trees. " The tiger felt happy to hear about the cake and wanted to eat their cake. So, he growled again, "Ohhh, how can you take wood from my forest without my permission? Come in front of me and I will eat you up."

Tona replied in a very weak voice, "Please, my Lord, the King of the jungle, do not eat me. I promise to give you a share of the cake. Please come under the tree where we live to eat the cake with us after it is made."

The tiger was happy to hear Tona's suggestion and felt tempted to eat the cake. So, he said, " How can I trust your word? I don't know where you live. " Then Tona gave directions to the king of the forest for going to their tree and invited him to come on Monday to eat their cake. The tiger happily said, " Huuuuum! Ok then, take the wood you need, but do not forget your promise to give me your cake."   "Certainly not," replied Tona and then carried the pieces of wood to their place in several trips.

The next Monday, when the farmer went out of his house to work in the field, Tuni made several trips to collect some water from the can placed above the well. Then she mixed the rice powder and water together into a dough and shaped it into a small cake. Tona lighted a fire and Tuni placed the pot over the fire and cooked the cake in the pot. Tona sat was sitting in front of the hearth when Tuni was cooking and as soon as the cake was finished they both started pecking at it. They both liked it so much that they went on eating the cake themselves and completely forgot all about the tiger. When the whole cake was finished, they suddenly heard the roaring sound and footsteps of the tiger. Hearing the sounds of the tiger's footsteps and roaring noise, Tona and Tuni remembered their promise to their tiger guest and started to tremble in fear.

Tona said, "Ohhhh!, My dear Tuni, what shall we do now? Now we are going to be eaten by the tiger." They did not know what to do, or where to hide. So, they flew up to the top of the tree and hid themselves right behind some leaves in the earthen pot in which they had made the cake.

"Halumm, hulumm, where are you Mister Tona? I have come at your invitation to eat the cake you made." Saying this, the tiger entered the farmer's yard and continued with his loud noises as he could not find either Tona or Tuni anywhere. He went on roaring and howling louder and louder.

 As we all know rice cakes are made and enjoyed during the winter season in Bangladesh and it was the month of December in the middle of winter. Sitting on the top branch of the tree under the open sky, Tuni started trembling and shivering with the cold and fear. Then Tuni whispered to Tona, "Dear Tona, I am feeling very cold and I am going to sneeze." Before Tona could reply, Tuni burst out with a loud sneeze,  "hachho! hachho! haaacho!!! With the sudden burst of Tona's loud sneezing, the old earthen pot in which they were hiding, broke with a loud burst of sound, "dharaash, dharaash, dhaam! "

The tiger got startled and jumped up in fear at the sound of the bursting pot as he feared the humans were firing guns at him. Without further thinking, he lifted his tail and made a big jump to run out of the farmer's yard to save himself. When Tona and Tuni saw the tiger running away, their fear was gone and they laughed with joy. Then they lived on their tree happily ever after.

You see birds and animals have their own languages and they understand one another's speech. Try to listen to their sounds and you may be able to understand what they are saying and you can then make friends with them.  Good luck with your trial!!!