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WORK SAMPLE: Plot outline & 4k word chapter

Genre: Young Adult Inspirational Fantasy

TITLE: Tasi's Beads

WORDCOUNT: 15-30k words

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PLOT OUTLINE

We get to know Tasi - a 12 year old girl who is having a hard time understanding and connecting with the spiritual truth of her Beads. Her Mumma acts as a gentle guide, encouraging her to stay faithful and focused.

Tasi goes into town and has a run-in with some bullies. She doesn't consult her beads first, and ends up acting foolishly and getting into a fight. She loses Mumma's canvas bag, and the money she was given, in the river. When she finally gives in and throws her beads, they give the symbols for "age" and "responsibility" - telling her to act mature; advice that she didn't take and now she's in trouble.

Tasi, now wet and muddy, keeps going into town, hoping to find a way to make up the money and replace the bag. One of the charlatans offers to "tell her fortune," and she scoffs, saying she's a better Reader. The woman goads her into making a bet with her, that if Tasi can tell a clearer fortune in her beads, she'll give her everything she's made that day. But if she fails, the woman gets "everything she's brought." Tasi thinks this is a great deal, since she has no money. But then the woman, after insisting that she's won the bet, claims that she gets to take Tasi's beads. Her Grandmumma's beads.

Tasi refuses to hand over the beads and tries to run from the charlatan woman. They get into a scuffle and the charlatan woman throws a little vial of some snake oil she's selling at Tasi, which splashes in her eyes and blinds her. She runs off somewhere safe, but now she can't see. She throws her beads and tries to trace the shape with her fingers, but it's too difficult. Struggling, she makes her way to her friend Darly's house.

Darly sneaks Tasi into her bedroom, and together they consult the beads. With Darly's help, Tasi reads *family* and *repair* - but she definitely doesn't want to return to her Mumma and admit what she's done. So they convince themselves that "family" means Darly's brother, and ask him for help instead. On his suggestion, they sneak back to the charlatan woman and try to steal more of her vials, hoping one of them reverses the blindness.

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The stolen vials do not work, and Tasi is getting more frantic. She should be home by now, and she still can't see! Being blinded forces Tasi to start to trust more, in Darly's guidance and in what the beads are telling her. They end up returning to Tasi's house and hide in the reeds along the river, watching. They discover that Poppa has returned early as a surprise. That's why Mumma's beads suggested hospitality! And Tasi's failure to bring home groceries doesn't matter, because he has a whole chest of food from the city.

Tasi is still worried about telling the truth about what happened - how she lost the money and the bag, how she ignored her beads, how she almost wagered away Grandmumma's beads, how she stole, and how she ended up blind. Darly encourages her to throw her beads, and they just say *honesty*. Tasi actually finds it easier to recognize the symbols now that she's tracing with her fingers. So Tasi and Darly approach and tell Tasi's parents everything, and Darly stays for dinner.

Tasi's parents say that the charlatan woman's silly potions often wear off after a day, so Tasi goes to sleep that night expecting to wake up with her sight back. When she wakes, she can see again, but she finds that it's still easier to read her beads with her fingers rather than her eyes. Plus, now she has a renewed appreciation for what they have to tell her.

The book ends with Tasi and Darly studying with Mumma, using Tasi's new eyes-closed method to understand the messages and advice they receive.

CHAPTER SAMPLE

“Tasi, are you studying your beads?”

Tasi rolled her eyes at her Mumma's question. Her beads were in a heap on her floor, next to the thick book of patterns she was supposed to be studying. She hadn't looked at them all morning. Instead, she was in front of her mirror, fixing her hair. Tasi was trying something new this morning: twisting her thick black curls into perfect little puffs, then tying each one with a brightly colored ribbon.

By the time her Mumma called up to ask her about her studies, she was more than halfway finished. Tasi turned her head in front of the mirror, smiling at the pretty ribbons.

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“Yes, Mumma,” she shouted. Hopefully that would buy her enough time to finish her new hairdo before Mumma came upstairs to check on her.

No such luck. Tasi heard footsteps approaching her bedroom door and launched herself at the book, hastily flipping it open to make it look like she was studying.

“Now why are you sprawled on the floor like that?” Mumma clicked her tongue at Tasi. “It isn’t good for your back. Come, sit at your desk like you should when you study.”

Tasi grumbled, but she grabbed the pattern book and hauled herself up off the floor. She had managed to avoid being scolded for not studying, but it seemed like there was always something she was doing wrong.

Mumma bent down and picked up the beads. She looked around at the ribbons scattered on the floor and sighed. “If you spent half the time on your studies as you did on your hair, you’d be a great Reader in no time. Just like your Grandmumma.”

Tasi knew better than to argue about that. She sat down at her desk with a huff, tucking her un-done hair behind her ear.

Mumma came to stand next to her, holding the strand of beads. They were beautiful, Tasi had to admit. Each one of the sixty seven beads was unique, made of brightly colored glass in swirling patterns. Unlike most strands, the beads were not connected by knotted string, but tiny bits of metal wire linked together.

Her favorite was the sixty-seventh bead, three times as big as the rest, known as the Throwing Bead. It was dark cobalt blue with gold specks throughout. Tasi always thought it looked like the sky on a new moon night.

“Here,” Mumma said, handing Tasi the beads. “Throw them.”

Tasi took the beads and wrapped her hand around the Throwing Bead, just like she’d been taught as a little girl. She bounced her hand once, twice, three times, then gave a gentle toss as she let go. The strand fell to the desk with a soft clatter. Mumma bent over the desk, reaching around Tasi’s shoulder to flip the book closed.

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“See there? That shape.” Mumma traced the line of beads with her finger. “What does it mean?”

Tasi rubbed her forehead, trying to remember. The beads had fallen into a looping shape that curled back on itself. Something about the soft curve seemed familiar, but it had been too long since she looked at her book. “Something about family?”

Mumma sighed softly. “Close, girlie. But look again.” Mumma ran her finger over the pattern again.

Tasi squinted at the beads. “I don’t know.”

Mumma tapped a spot where the strand of beads crossed over itself. “You were right that the main loop means *family*. But this cross here adds another meaning: *past* or *history*. Combine the two, and what do you get?”

Tasi thought for a second. “Ancestors?”

“Yes.” Mumma’s smile was lovely, like the yellow and copper beads that sparkled in Tasi’s strand. “It’s your Grandmumma, love. These were her beads. She was a great Reader.”

“I know,” Tasi said, staring glumly down at the beads on her desk.

“So do you know what it means, this throw?”

Tasi was pretty sure she knew what answer Mumma wanted, even if she didn’t exactly believe it herself. “It means I need to practice and study so I can become a great Reader like her.”

“Exactly.” Mumma went to pat Tasi’s head, then stopped and tugged at one of the little ribbon-tied puffs. “And take these out. They’re silly.”

Tasi did not take them out - after Mumma left, she finished up and spent some time admiring her hairstyle in the mirror. She wanted to walk into town and show them off, but Mumma would never let her do that. Not after the beads told her to stay home and study.

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She picked up the Throwing Bead and let it fall to the desk, loud enough that Mumma could hear that she was practicing. It fell in an almost heart-shaped pattern, with a wobbly circle around it.

The heart shape was one she recognized - it meant love, which was easy enough to remember. But she wasn't sure about the larger shape. Tasi flipped through the book of shapes, trying to match it.

There it was: *life, or, the things that surround you*. Combined, the two meant gratitude, finding love for the things in your life.

Mumma always told her to count her blessings. Now the beads were saying the same thing.

Tasi gazed out the window, trying to think of things to be grateful for. Down in the yard, Mumma was picking herbs for dinner while laundry dried on the line. She knew she was lucky to have such a great Reader in her family. Even inheriting her Grandmumma's beads was very special. Most of the kids in town were using strings of plain wooden beads to learn.

But it also came with a lot of pressure. Everyone expected her to know all her patterns already. Even worse, now that she was almost thirteen, she was supposed to start doing more than just identifying patterns. Adult Readers knew how to use their beads to answer questions, guide their choices, and understand the Flow.

The Flow was something Tasi had never understood. According to all the grownups, the Flow was the breath and the movement of the world, connecting all things, and willing goodness to all. Following the Flow meant you were contributing to that goodness, so it was important to know what the will was. Or so Mumma said. No matter how much she tried, Tasi struggled to feel connected to the Flow, or see what any of it had to do with her life.

Still, she knew she had to try. If not for herself, for Mumma and for her Grandmumma. And for her Poppa, who was a traveling tutor and Reader who helped others understand what the Flow willed for them. He was always so proud whenever he came home and saw how much Tasi had learned. Someday, he would take her out on the road with him, and she would help Read for those who struggled.

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Tasi wanted to connect with the Flow and understand the will of goodness, like her Grandmumma. And she wanted to help people the way her Poppa did. But she wasn't sure how.

Tasi slept that night with a soft cloth wrapped around her head, trying to preserve her hairdo in case she got an opportunity to head into town the next day. She threw her beads a few times before bed, trying to determine whether Mumma would let her go see her friends, but all they gave her were the patterns for *desire* and *sleep*.

It figured. Mumma always told her that the beads weren't for fortunetelling; that the Flow didn't work like that. Tasi certainly wished that, just once, things would be that easy. What was the point of Reading if she couldn't get a clear answer? Some people in town claimed that they could use the beads to tell your future or even find you someone to marry, but Mumma and Poppa insisted that they were charlatans, or liars.

Tasi set her strand of beads on her nightstand and lay down, resting her head lightly on the pillow to keep from crushing the little puffs.

As it turned out, Mumma was more than happy to send Tasi into town the next morning. During her morning Reading, the beads had shown her patterns for *friendship* and *welcome*, so Mumma wanted to host a dinner for their two neighbors. Only a few little houses remained this far out of town - theirs, an older couple named Mara and Wells, and a family with three rambunctious little boys that Tasi sometimes watched.

"Get candles for the table," Mumma said, handing Tasi a large canvas bag to bring things back in. "That's the biggest bag we've got, and there'll be no more canvas shipments down the river for at least a month yet, so be careful with it."

"Yes, Mumma." It was important to take good care of everything in their little house. Living so far from the big city meant it was hard to replace things that got lost or broken, even if they had the money for it, which they often didn't.

"And an extra loaf of bread. Oil, too, for dipping. See if any of the vegetables look good enough to be worth buying - if not, we'll pick some river roots before sundown." Mumma gave Tasi a little handful of coins, which she dropped into the bag before slinging it over her shoulders.

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“Okay, Mumma!”

Tasi headed for the door, but stopped when she heard Mumma’s voice calling after her.

“Wait! Where are your beads?”

Tasi rolled her eyes. She was just running out to get groceries! “They’re upstairs. In my room.”

Mumma crossed her arms. “Go get them! You shouldn’t just run off without them.”

Tasi was frustrated now. “But Mumma,” she whined. “I don’t need them.”

Mumma looked shocked. “That’s no way to talk. We all need to know what the Flow wills. That way, we can be sure we’re sowing goodness in the world.”

“Why can’t I just make my *own* choices, instead of having some bits of glass tell me what to do all the time?” Tasi hadn’t realized she had shouted until she saw the look on her mother’s face. “I’m sorry,” she mumbled, picking at a loose thread on the canvas bag.

“It’s alright, sweetpea. Come here.” Mumma sat down at the cluttered dining room table, and Tasi joined her. “I know it’s hard, having Poppa out on the road instead of here to help teach you. Learning to Read doesn’t come easy to everyone. It’s okay to be frustrated.”

Tasi just nodded. She hadn’t expected this kind of talk and didn’t know what to say.

“But the beads don’t tell us what to do. They just give us information, to help us make better choices. Think about this: if you were going to dig for river root, would you want to dig blind, or would you ask Mrs. Mara next door where the best ones were growing?”

“I’d ask Mrs. Mara,” Tasi said, looking down at the rough wood of the table. Of course she wouldn’t want to spend all day digging around in the dirt if she didn’t have a good sense that she’d find something delicious.

“And why would you ask her?”

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“Because she always knows where to dig. She’s lived along the river forever. She can see by the leaves where the sweet ones are.”

“That’s right, sweetpea.” Tasi finally looked up to see that Mumma was smiling softly at her. “And that’s what the beads help us do. Just like Mrs. Mara knows where the best roots grow, the Flow knows what the world should look like, and what’s best for us. The Flow wills goodness to all. So if we want to live a good life, don’t you think we should ask the one who has the best information?”

It did make sense, when Mumma put it like that. But it wasn’t that simple. “I wish it was easier,” Tasi said. “Sometimes the beads just don’t tell me anything. It’s just words. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

Mumma laughed. “First you don’t want the beads telling you what to do, then you want them to tell you exactly what to do. You’re a treat and a half, Tasilally.”

Tasi always liked hearing her full name, especially the way Mumma said it. It sounded like the river singing through the stalks of reeds along the shore. She smiled back at her mother, feeling a bit better.

“You’ll find your path,” Mumma said. “The Flow speaks to everyone, but we all have to find our ways to listen. For now, just do your best, and keep practicing. Now run upstairs, grab your beads, and head on out.”

It took about twenty minutes to walk into town, and Tasi spent most of it wading along the shores of the river. Her town, Otter’s Glen, was named for the otters that splashed and played in the river all through the summer and spring. The river itself was named the Blendbourne River, but everyone just called it “the river.”

There were hundreds of little towns scattered along the Blendbourne, all the way up to the great city of Drumhill. In the fall, when the river got too cold to dig roots and catch fish, half the grownups from all the little towns sailed and rowed their way up the Blendbourne to work in the city.

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Tasi had never been, though she heard that it was always warmer there than along the river, even in the wintertime, and that people there rode tall horses with shining leather bridles. Kids in the city of Drumhill didn't learn Reading from their parents or tutors, either. They went to schools, and everyone could Read by the age of eight.

She wasn't heading toward the city, though. She was heading downriver, into Otter's Glen. Tasi reached up and patted her head, enjoying the way her black hair warmed in the sun. If she was lucky, she'd see her friend Darly, who lived in town with her two older brothers.

But as she approached town, the first voice Tasi heard wasn't Darly. It was Harlan and his crew - a bunch of boys from town who liked to tease her and Darly. Last time they'd run into each other, Harlan had taken Darly's pretty summer cape and ripped the lace off the edge, then tossed it in the mud before running off laughing.

Tasi had done her best to cheer Darly up and help clean up the cape, but it made her so angry to see how devastated her friend had been. The cape was expensive, and Darly didn't have much money. She'd saved up for ages to buy a pretty lacy cape for the summer, and it was brand new when the boys ruined it. As Darly cried, Tasi had promised that the next time she ran into Harlan, she'd make sure something of his got destroyed, and he'd see how it felt.

Now here they were, rough housing at the edge of town. None of them had noticed Tasi yet - they were all too busy with a caimin, a type of two foot long aquatic lizard that lived in the River. They were docile, and they rarely bit people - they mostly preferred to float in the river, nap on sunny rocks, and be left alone. But these boys were teasing it, poking it with sticks and preventing it from getting back into the water. It looked scared. One of the boys kicked a cloud of dust toward the animal's eyes, leaving it half-blind as it thrashed around and tried to get away.

Tasi considered asking her beads what she ought to do, but she didn't feel like it. She hated Harlan and his awful friends, and she already knew what she planned to do when she ran into them. The beads always told her to be patient and forgiving or to avoid getting into fights, but nothing the beads told her could convince her to let Harlan get away with it.

Ignoring the soft clatter of the glass beads around her neck, Tasi started running as fast as she could, jumping on Harlan before he could do much about it. Grabbing at the collar of his nice woven shirt, she did her best to tear it before he could shove her off.

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She managed to make a small rip in Harlan's shirt, but he was bigger than her and quickly pushed her away, sending her into the dirt next to the confused caimin. Instead of lunging back at Harlan, Tasi decided to try and help the poor creature. She picked it up and tried to head toward the edge of the river, but Harlan and his friends were mad now, and they especially didn't want to lose their captured lizard.

Someone reached down and took hold of the strap on Tasi's canvas bag to pull her away from the caimin. She held on tight to the squirming creature, but she felt a 'snap' as the canvas ripped and the bag was torn from her.

"My bag!" Tasi cried, stumbling toward the boy who held it. "Give it back!" In the commotion, the caimin slipped from her arms, and with the boys all distracted, it was able to scamper away and slip back into the water.

Laughing, the boys tossed the bag between each other, keeping it away from Tasi, who kept shouting at them to give it back. The coins that Mumma had given her fell out onto the ground, and the boys whooped victoriously, crowding in to collect them.

"You took our pet away, so it's only fair you gotta pay for it!" Harlan sneered as he stomped down on one of the coins, preventing Tasi from picking it up.

"That caimin wasn't your pet!" Tasi cried, trying to push Harlan off the coin. "You were just teasing it!"

"What are you, the pet police?" Harlan shoved Tasi again, harder this time. She gave up on retrieving the coin and tried to get Mumma's nice canvas bag back from the bullies.

"You want it?" The boys teased, pretending that they would toss it to her, then lobbing it high over her head. "Get it!"

Once they got bored of this mean spirited game, though, it still wasn't enough. Rather than giving it back, or even just dropping it in the dirt, Harlan flung the bag toward the river, where it landed with a splash and started to float away.

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“Hey!” Tasi ran after it, slipping around and getting herself covered in mud. She could hear the boys laughing and jeering as she swam a short ways out from the shore, chasing after the bag, but it was no use. The river went too fast here, and there were various boats launching from the town docks. It wasn’t safe to swim out that far. Mumma’s bag was gone.

By the time Tasi made it back to land, Harlan and his friends had wandered off, presumably to find someone else to torment. Even the caiman was long gone. Tasi was alone, dripping wet and without any of the money or even the bag she’d been sent with to carry things home.