

A FIRST-CHAPTER PREVIEW

ROOM 12

The Year We Met Sammy

BOOK ONE OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF GRACE

James Anthony Ramsden

School of Life Foundation

CHAPTER ONE

Who Am I?



The first thing Ms. Calloway did, on the first morning of first grade in Room 12, was take a small green frog puppet out of a wooden box. The frog had floppy legs and one slightly crooked eye and a felt mouth that opened with her hand.

“Friends,” she said, “this is Sammy. Sammy is going to be in our class all year. Sammy is part of our class. Sammy is going to help us learn how to be a class.”

She made Sammy wave at the ten children sitting on the carpet. “Hi,” said Sammy, in a voice that was a little softer than Ms. Calloway’s regular voice, and a little warmer. “I am Sammy. I want to know all about you. Can you tell me one thing that makes you special?” There was a long pause.

This is how every first morning of first grade goes. Adults forget this. There is always a long pause before the first child speaks, because the first day of first grade is enormous, and the ten children on the carpet have all just realized that they will be in this room every single day for the entire year, and they do not yet know who they are going to be in it. Marcus was the first to speak. Marcus is almost always the first to speak. He had a small chip on his front tooth from where he had fallen off his bike in May, and a sister at home named Aaliyah who was three, and a feeling in his chest that he wanted to say something good and was not sure what it would be.

“I am six,” Marcus said. “I have a sister. Her name is Aaliyah and she is THREE.”

Sammy nodded. “Six is a good age. Three is a good age too. Aaliyah is lucky to have a big brother.”

Marcus sat up a little straighter on the carpet. He had not realized, before this moment, that he was lucky for Aaliyah. He had mostly thought of Aaliyah as somebody who broke things he was building. It was a new thought.

“Who is next?” said Sammy.

Amara was next. Amara had recently moved to a new town from a different town, and at the new town nobody had ever heard her name pronounced the way her grandmother said it. She had been deciding, all summer, what she would tell the kids at her new school when they asked. “My name is Amara,” she said. And then she said it a second time, the way her grandmother said it. Amara. Three syllables. The *a* at the end soft, like a small breath.

“That is a beautiful name,” said Sammy. “How does it sound when your grandmother says it?”

Amara almost smiled. “Like that,” she said. “Like how I just said it.” “Then that is the name,” said Sammy. “That is your name.”

Then Sofia, who had a worried stomach almost every morning, said she liked dogs. Then Priya, who was already a careful child, said she liked to write her letters very neatly. Then Darius said he liked the color red and almost nothing else, which made Ms. Calloway laugh. Then Jordan said something that was supposed to be a joke, and the other kids laughed, and Jordan looked pleased, and Sammy said, “You are funny. I will remember that you are funny.”

Then it was Maya’s turn, and Maya did not say anything.

Maya was the smallest child in Room 12. She had recently moved from somewhere else, like Amara, but unlike Amara she had not decided what she was going to tell people about herself. Maya looked at the floor. Ms. Calloway crouched down next to Maya, and her crouching was quiet — the kind of crouching adults do when they have been around children for a long time and know how to take up less space. “It is okay to be quiet today, Maya,” she said. “Sammy already knows one thing about you. Sammy knows you are here. That is enough for today.”

Maya looked up. Her eyes were big.

“Sammy already knows I am here?” she said, very quietly.

“Sammy already knows you are here,” said Ms. Calloway.

That was the moment Maya decided to come back the next day.

Then Theo went, and then Mia, and last of all Kezia, who said she lived with her grandmother, which surprised exactly nobody because Kezia had told everyone about her grandmother at the door that morning. When all ten of them had spoken — or had been quiet, in Maya’s case — Ms. Calloway said, “Now you have all told us one thing. There are a million more things to know. We have a whole year.”

Then she put Sammy back in the wooden box, very gently, and the wooden box went on the high shelf where it would live for the rest of the year, and the first day of first grade in Room 12 was officially under way. This is how the year begins. With a question. *Who am I?*

You do not have to answer it all at once. You can answer one little piece of it every day. That is how it gets answered. One piece at a time, across a whole year, in a room with a teacher and a frog puppet and nine other children.

END OF THE FIRST-CHAPTER PREVIEW

The year is just beginning.

Room 12 — The Year We Met Sammy

Book One of the five-book companion series to *The Architecture of Grace*