



If Your Mirror Could Talk, What Would It Say?

A lot, it turns out.
In Roshani Chokshi's take on Filipino mythology, every reflective surface is a doorway into the spirit world. Your mirror is always watching, always listening. If you could learn how to understand its silent glassy language, you might hear a few things about your past, your future, and the bad things coming your way. . . .

The Spirit Glass is peppered with beautiful whispered asides from the world's many looking glasses. By the end of the book, I was glancing suspiciously at the full-length mirror in my hallway, wondering what secrets it kept and where it might lead. That's the power of a Roshani Chokshi novel. Not only does it let you into a new world, but that new world seeps into your own and becomes a part of your life.

Here's one secret my mirror might tell you: I read *The Spirit Glass* in a single day, because I simply could not put it down. Once finished, I paced back and forth, muttering to myself, *Wow, I did not think I could love any protagonist more than I love Aru Shah. But now there is Corazon Lopez. . . .* Forgive me, Aru, for those words of

blasphemy! *The Spirit Glass* is just *that* good. It's making me question everything I thought I knew.

For instance, I had no idea that anitos were a thing. Why can't I have a megalomaniacal glowing polka-dotted gecko as my magical companion? It's not fair.

Why isn't my house like Corazon's magical House, sprouting new windows and porches when it's happy, making me breakfast just because it loves me, producing an endless supply of comfy pillows and blankets for movie night in the living room?

Most important, what flavors of magical sorbetes could I buy at the Midnight Bridge market? That's another powerful thing about Rosh's novels: you will get very hungry for all the delicious food she describes.

Of course, Corazon Lopez's life isn't all geckos and ice cream. As a young babaylan-in-training, she is still waiting for her full powers to manifest. She's understandably nervous. Will she be able to control the weather? Or raise the dead? Or turn sunlight into diamonds? She worries she will never be as powerful as her parents, or her aunt Tina, who can sing vegetables right out of a garden and read the future in drips of candle wax.

There's also the small matter of Corazon's parents being... well, dead. It's lovely that their souls can visit for Saturday dinner, but a few hours a week isn't enough! Corazon yearns to become a full-fledged babaylan so she can use her spirit key to manifest her parents all the time. Then they can be a proper family again.

Alas, many things stand in the way of Corazon's aspiration. Aunt Tina is keeping secrets about the family's history. She refuses to read Corazon's future for fear of what it might hold.

Corazon's babaylan powers are stubbornly slow to manifest. And worse of all, during a chance encounter at the Midnight Bridge, Corazon makes a mistake that might prevent her from ever getting her parents back. To fix that mistake, the young shaman and her small but surprisingly bloodthirsty reptile sidekick must navigate the spirit world, overcoming ghosts and monsters and magic. But one thing you will learn in *The Spirit Glass*: you should never bet against Corazon Lopez.

My favorite part of this book—okay, I have many favorite parts—but *one* of my favorite parts is how magic bartering works. When you buy a spell, a charm, or a potion, you must offer something of equal value. How do you know what's fair? You simply *do*. There's a satisfying *click* as the balance of the universe settles into place, and both sides agree, yep, that was a good trade. Wouldn't it be nice if all transactions were like that?

Corazon Lopez is offering you a trip through the multigenerational, multicultural, multi-mythological world of Filipino folklore—a world of seven thousand islands, 150 languages, myriad religions, and countless stories. You will be thrilled, surprised, enchanted, and hungry when you finish this book. What price could possibly be a fair trade for such an experience?

The best price of all? Just read the book. I think you'll find, as I did, that when you finish *The Spirit Glass*, the universe will rebalance with a satisfying *click*, and you will feel that you got a very good trade indeed. Your world will seem bigger. You'll see magic everywhere. And if you happen to catch the sound of your mirrors whispering to one another, well, to quote an old friend of mine, "Don't say I didn't warn you."

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rick Rinclan". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.



ONE

Corazon Lopez possessed a rare and secret power, the kind that could make a river shrivel into a puddle or trap a tornado in a jar. She could climb the stars like a staircase and pull down clouds for her pillows. The only problem was that this secret power was apparently just so humongous and so hard to handle that it remained a secret... even from Corazon.

But not for much longer.

Hopefully.

Corazon had the blood of a *babaylan*, a rare mortal who guarded the boundaries between the human world and the realm of spirits. Some babaylans whispered to the weather. Others brewed potions that could lure a soul back into a dying body. Some could even sift through dreams to find glimmers of the future. It all depended on each babaylan's particular gift.

On a Saturday evening, Corazon stood in the kitchen and threw back her shoulders. She closed her eyes and reached for her magic. It always felt stubborn and sulking, like she was trying to pull it from a nice, warm bed and it didn't want to move.

She held her squirming, scruffy magic with all her strength before taking a deep breath and shouting, "*Heed my power and heed it well, lift into the air as I compel!*"

Corazon opened one eye. The spoon on the counter had not budged.

"Get thee to the dining table!" said Corazon, throwing up her hands. "Please?"

The spoon wriggled weakly. Ever so slowly, it hovered off the counter.

"It's happening!" exclaimed a small, bell-like voice. "Your gift is waking up!"

Beside the somewhat-levitating spoon, Corazon's companion *anito* poked his head over the rim of a teacup. The *anito* looked like a small, glowing blue lizard with bulging eyes, violet polka dots, and a long tail.

All *babaylans* have companion *anito*. They are the spirits of mountains, rivers, streams, and trees. The more powerful the *babaylan*, the more powerful and impressive the companion *anito*.

Corazon loved her small *anito*, but she was fairly certain that the most impressive thing about Saso was his imagination.

"Your gift is to preside over all... spoons? No, *silverware!* Yes!" Saso cackled, his speckled tail whipping out over the teacup. "Henceforth, all dining utensils shall answer to *us!* You shall wear a crown of butter knives, Corazon! Together, we will wage a war on blenders and—"

The spoon—which had lifted barely an inch off the tile and perhaps felt overwhelmed at the prospect of warfare—clattered back to the counter. With a final twitch, the spoon went still,

and Corazon dropped her hands. Even that small exertion of magic had left her feeling dizzy.

"Well, definitely no gift for metal," said Corazon.

"Oh," said Saso, his tail flopping. "Well... blenders would have made for a weak adversary anyway." He blinked up at her. "But if you like, we can still make the crown of butter knives?"

"That's okay, Saso," said Corazon, quietly folding up her disappointment. "We just have to be patient."

"Excellent notion!" said Saso happily. "You be patient, and I will be obsessive!"

"How is that helpful?"

"I don't know, but it's certainly inevitable."

"True," Corazon said with a sigh.

All her life she had been told that she would be a great babaylan. She just had to *wait*. But she'd been waiting for years, and in two days she would be twelve! That's when most babaylan started their official training...and Corazon still had *no* sign that her magic was anywhere near waking up.

"At least it's Saturday," said Saso.

Corazon grinned. Sometimes she felt that her week was one long held breath as she counted down the days until Saturday dinner. It was the best night of the week. But it was also the worst night, because it always came to an end.

Corazon held out her hand, and Saso hopped from the teacup to her palm. She looked around at the tidy white kitchen, with its ropes of garlic bulbs and bundles of drying herbs hanging from the ceiling.

"I'm going to need three plates," Corazon told the kitchen. "Actually, four. Just in case."

Corazon checked her father's watch. The timepiece had a cracked midnight-blue face and two worn leather straps that were so big the watch would've fallen off her wrist if the House hadn't fixed it. The time was seven minutes past seven in the evening. Which meant Corazon had exactly twenty-three minutes to finish setting the table.

"Corazon, may I pick the movie tonight?" asked Saso.

A month ago, Saso had picked the 1933 *King Kong* film and spent the rest of the week crashing into pottery, swinging from the lamp fixtures, and shouting "*I AM HUNGRY! AND I CRAVE ARCHITECTURE!!!*"

Her aunt, Celestina—Tina, for short—had threatened to sell him to a pet store.

"Maybe next time," Corazon said to Saso, gathering the blue plates that had magically appeared on the counter. "It's almost my birthday, and that's usually story night, remember?"

"Oh, that will be most excellent!" said Saso, swishing his blue tail. "Will the tale have lots of blood?"

"Probably not," said Corazon as she reached for a pitcher of water.

"No cries of mortal anguish?"

"Nope."

"I hate it already."

Corazon rolled her eyes. Saso, which was short for Samson, had been her companion anito for years. As far as he knew, he'd been asleep for a long time before he awoke curled up in the bassinet of a newborn Corazon.

It had been the same way for Corazon's mother, Althea. Her companion anito was a shimmering blue python, nearly twenty

feet long in his full form. He was named Caching—improbably shortened from the name Escolastica—and was the spirit of a massive *toog*, a rosewood tree. By day, Caching transformed himself into an elaborate bracelet while Althea worked as a nurse on the hospital's cardiology floor. By night, he took on his true shape and assisted Althea in her healing magic.

"I think my camouflage is changing again!" said Saso. He sighed happily as he examined his reflection on the side of a pan. "I really am an incredibly rare and exquisite baby crocodile."

Corazon had never heard of a crocodile that could camouflage. And with his bulging eyes, stubby snout, and spotted tail, Saso looked a lot more like a small blue gecko.

But Saso didn't need to know that.

"You do look more . . . bluish," said Corazon.

Saso preened. "Good, good. It's very important to stay camouflaged. Otherwise, people would be so intimidated by me! And, by extension, *you*! Only a babaylan of extraordinary skill would have a crocodile anito." Saso blinked up at her affectionately. "And you, Corazon, are definitely extraordinary! Soon you'll be just like your mom! Or Tina!"

Corazon was beginning to doubt that she'd *ever* be extraordinary, much less as good as her mom or aunt.

By the time Althea was ten years old, she could brew and bottle a year's worth of beauty tonic. Whenever Corazon tried to brew anything, the potion turned into useless sludge. And if Corazon so much as *poked* a bottle, it would explode. Althea was considered powerful, but her sister, Tina, was something else entirely.

Corazon had once seen her aunt shush a thunderstorm. The

storm had been so embarrassed that it slouched across the sky, dragging its rain clouds behind it like a tail. Tina could coax the poison out of a rattlesnake with a well-placed compliment. She could catch the sparkles of light on a pond and turn them into diamonds.

Tina was somewhere in her mid-thirties and looked like a warrior queen. Wherever she went, her long black hair streamed behind her as if blown by an invisible wind. Her companion anito, a huge and graceful eagle named Luzviminda—Minda, for short—always soared above her, snapping at the air. Together they made a terrifying pair—Minda’s ferocious grace was the perfect complement to the beautiful, elegant Tina.

Next to them, Corazon felt rather silly.

Whenever Corazon walked into the garden behind the House, the plants shriveled up. Once, Corazon had been convinced that the flora was talking to her when she heard a rosebush crying. Then the bush asked for a belly rub. And some yarn.

This had seemed like a very strange request until Corazon realized that it was not the rosebush speaking, but a dead cat buried under its roots.

When Corazon dug it up, the cat—which was mostly bone with a tuft of orange fur on its tail—had *mrrreowed*, rubbed its skull against her leg, and proceeded to hunt a bug.

Since then, Lazarus had become something of a guard cat who lived in the garden.

You just have to wait, Corazon told herself once again. *Be patient.*

Out of habit, she touched her necklace chain and the delicate golden key that hung from it. It was Corazon’s most precious

possession in the world. A true soul key gifted to her by her mother.

Corazon began to set the table. She put flowers in a pitcher of water and added big serving spoons to the bowl of pancit and steamed milkfish that had magically appeared. As she worked, she smoothed her dress. It was a family heirloom and made of black silk with enchanted silver threads weaving clouds across the fabric. Corazon only took it out of her closet on special occasions, although sometimes the dress liked to slip off its hanger and hover near the windows simply to be closer to the moonlight.

“How do I look, Saso?”

“Delectable!” said the anito, hopping down from the ceiling to land on her shoulder. “The most mouthwatering babaylan in all the land!”

Once, this dress had belonged to Althea. She had worn it right before her own twelfth birthday, when *her* mother, another powerful babaylan, had taught Althea magic. Corazon had always imagined that Althea would teach her how to be a babaylan. But life had other plans, and now Tina would be her teacher instead. Young, powerful Tina who looked like Althea but had none of her warmth.

“Should I call you *Tita*?” Corazon had asked Tina the day they first met. Althea had never mentioned a younger sister, but then again, she rarely answered questions about her family. When Corazon had asked her father about it, his answer was short and cagey: “It wasn’t easy for your mom to leave home.”

The only person Althea had ever spoken of was her mother. *Oh, anak. I wish you could’ve known her. Once, she was the stuff of legends.*

When Tina had arrived on the scene, all of Corazon's imaginings of a kindly and fun-loving aunt had vanished.

"She looks like she eats nieces for breakfast," Saso had muttered.

"Do *not* call me Tita," said Tina.

And so, Tina had remained Tina.

Saso suddenly squeaked from his perch on her shoulder. "Corazon, do you think the House will make us cake? It's two days until your birthday . . . and though I dearly love the tender snap of femurs and tibias, I quite like chocolate, too."

By then Corazon had moved to the kitchen and started slicing up the tiny green calamansi fruit to squeeze over their dinner. To her left, the refrigerator door swung open. The collection of small black-dot magnets on the front zoomed together to form a frowny face.

"Yes, but also, stop nagging it?" translated Corazon. "That's the fourth time you've asked . . . today."

"I am an apex predator," said Saso. "I have *needs*."

The magnets dispersed and then rearranged themselves into a question mark.

Corazon smiled. "Two minutes and then they'll be here."

The question mark turned into a heart shape.

In many ways, Tina's House was a lot like other houses. The outside was the color of a robin's egg. The House had a sunny living room with two squashy sofas, a small dining room with a long table piled high with boxes Tina kept meaning to sort through, three cozy bedrooms, a kitchen, and a backyard with a garden.

But there were rather large differences, too. . . .

Sometimes the House got bored with being the color of a robin's egg and changed its coat of paint from blue to pink. Occasionally it even sprouted bay windows and balconies. The living room sofa regularly watched dramatic romance movies, and at least once a year the sprinklers would go off during a particularly depressing scene. Upstairs, the bedrooms grew night-lights like mushrooms, and the kitchen huffed and puffed, always cooking or rearranging the silverware.

Tina's House was *alive*.

But more than that . . . it loved Corazon.

It was the House that tucked her in each evening and made sure she always had a sweater when it got cold outside. The House kept her company while she was doing Tina's endless homework assignments, and it made all her meals. And even if Corazon didn't like it when the curtains flapped noisily the second she dozed off mid-studying, or how the cookie jar would be full of cookies one moment and carrot sticks the next, Corazon loved the House, too.

At precisely 7:23 p.m., Corazon began to walk down the front hallway. As she walked, the soul key hummed against her skin. *Soon, soon, soon*, it sang.

The dark brown door to Tina's workroom glowed in anticipation. Here, Tina's House branched into its different sections. To the right was the staircase winding up to the bedrooms. To the left was the door that led to Tina's vast workspace. It was an ancient door made of Philippine agarwood, with the carved head of a carabao staring at her from the center. The water buffalo blinked lazily.

Corazon hadn't seen Tina all day. But then again, Tina never

came out for Saturday meals. Even so, Corazon still asked the door, “Is she joining us for dinner?”

The carabao regarded her with its flat, dark eyes and then opened its mouth. “*ABSOLUTELY NOOOOOOOOOOT.*”

Then it swung its horned head and melted into the wood, taking the doorknob with it.

“What a rude swamp cow!” said Saso. “When I grow up, I shall *feast* on you and—”

Just then, there was a loud knock at the front door.

Saso wagged his spotted tail. “They’re here!”

“I know,” said Corazon, her heart beating a little faster.

Unlike Tina, Corazon Lopez’s parents never missed family dinner on Saturday nights. Not even being dead for three years could change that.