

# MY ANIMAL UNDERSTUDY REPLACED ME IN THE SCHOOL PRODUCTION OF THE TEMPEST

poem by Luigi Coppola

Cast as Caliban, my shuddered spine  
and wrung hands hid me in the wings  
when my cue came. I sweated through

the makeshift costume of tissue feathers  
and glued fur and plastic teeth and rubber  
claws and cardboard scales and rug skin  
and tinfoil tusks and foam horns and wire  
wings and a sting that flopped behind me,  
an amalgamation of animals, both free now  
and fossilised then, all brought to semi-

life offstage. Paper mâché hooves clung  
to the boards, treading a stillness that  
couldn't be moved no matter how much  
the teacher/director/failed actor push-pulled,  
shout-whispered, tug-shoved at my stuffed-

bursting frame. Then something inside me  
stepped out: part me, part free; part human,  
part animal; part thought, part instinct.  
I watched from my wingless wings  
and envied what I heard and saw and

felt: every word spoken spotlighted;  
every step stilled the air; every gesture  
so weighted they shook the hands of all  
that watched. The servant acted equal  
to the master—and so was, amongst  
the noises, sounds, and sweet airs of the isle,  
the aisle, the stage, and this brave new world.

The applause lasted the length of a storm.

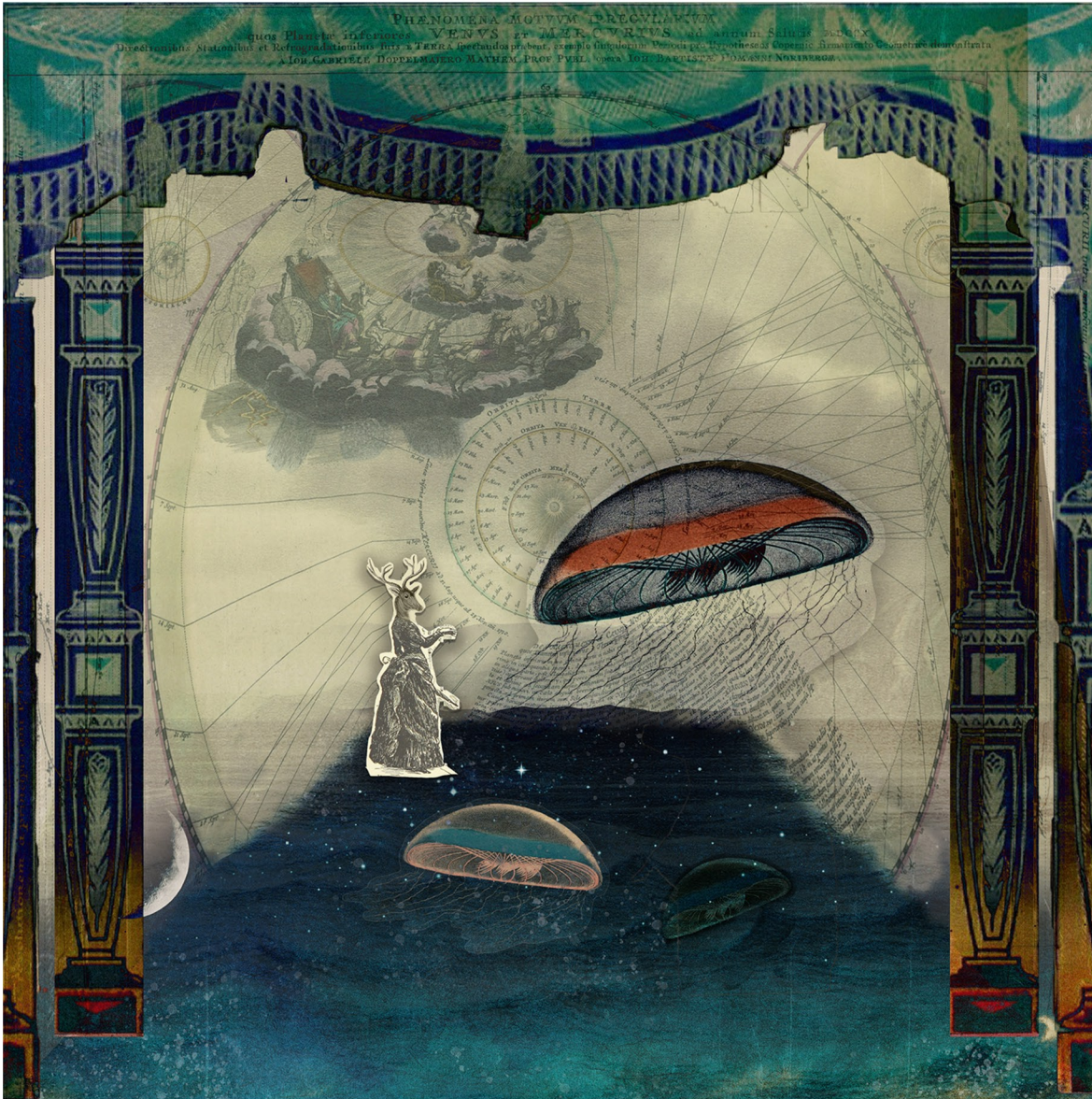


Image: "Diaphona" by Sarah-Jane Crowson. "My Animal Understudy Replaced Me in the School Production of *The Tempest*" was written by Luigi Coppola for *Rattle*'s Ekphrastic Challenge, February 2022, and selected as the Editor's Choice.