

(Award winning poem, 'Maude Jane Delap', placed first, at the 'Write By The Sea Literary Festival,' Poetry category, at Kilmore Quay, Co. Wexford, 2019 and overall winner of the 2019 Write By The Sea Writing Competitions.)

Maude Jane Delap

By Daniel Wade

Where cold-water coral crouches
in the undertow of Valentia
and the seal chirps and slouches
despite a gannet's diving caw,
she rows among grey-green swells.
Lunar plankton-glow frisks
the skeg, a crest's rogue gurgle
and sunken tow-net whisk

the sea with their crimped scrape.
Humming to herself hymns soft
as the noted, nameless kelp,
she sets all fear, all doubt adrift
like the plunked mutter of stones,
works her passage to rarer knowledge.
Fathoms drink her dropped line
'til a swarm of jellyfish are dredged

like pearls for pruning, to be ferried
inshore to her crude herbarium,
where possibility shimmers amid
the squelching dreg of a storm.
So salute her skull's basin
where theories stealthily swim
and test against the current,
wrenching as the sight and smell

of sea-spray gusting over the bow.
She has filed away the waves' murk
and dove headlong to get through
a natural banquet, beard of rock,
tide-splash, shingle-clack underfoot,
to know that Whitestrand is combed
enough as she disembarks, alights
for the luminance of her lab's sanctum.