



Sea Change

S.M. Wheeler

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The unhappy child of two powerful parents who despise each other, young Lilly turns to the ocean to find solace, which she finds in the form of the eloquent and intelligent sea monster Octavius, a kraken. In Octavius's many arms, Lilly learns of friendship, loyalty, and family. When Octavius, forbidden by Lilly to harm humans, is captured by seafaring traders and sold to a circus, Lilly becomes his only hope for salvation. Desperate to find him, she strikes a bargain with a witch that carries a shocking price.

Her journey to win Octavius's freedom is difficult. The circus master wants a Coat of Illusions; the Coat tailor wants her undead husband back from a witch; the witch wants her skin back from two bandits; the bandits just want some company, but they might kill her first. Lilly's quest tests her resolve, tries her patience, and leaves her transformed in every way.

Sea Change Details

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Author : S.M. Wheeler

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From Reader Review Sea Change for online ebook

Jennifer Wheeler says

This book is very reminiscent of Hans Christian Anderson's work. If you're looking for a happy ending, then I suggest you look elsewhere. The main character goes on a quest to obtain the release of her captured friend, and many horrible things happen to her along the way. In the end, after all of the hardships she's endured, she wins her friend's freedom by relinquishing her memories of him in payment. I did enjoy the storyline, and the many interesting magical creatures therein....but it wasn't a book that I couldn't put down, and I didn't feel the need to rush back to it each time that I did. I've read much longer books, in a much shorter period of time. I kept falling asleep while reading it, so even though I did like it, that's why I've only given a 2 star rating.

Kristen says

Lilly is a strange child, caring more about her friend the kraken than her parents, who bicker constantly. The day her mother leaves, she knows that it will soon be time for her to leave as well. Her father never wanted a daughter, especially not one who has a birthmark on her face. When he remarries, she finds herself ready to leave, to be replaced by another child. What she wasn't expecting was for her friend to go missing, Octavius the kraken seems to have vanished, so Lilly sets out on a journey to find him.

And as in all quests, there are witches and bandits, magical being and creatures. Lilly soon finds herself becoming Lyle, in a gruesome trade with a witch, stealing her own womanhood and shaping her into a young man, yet lacking. I found this part disturbing and yet fitting to the start of what becomes a terror filled adventure. I'm not sure how I can describe this book. From Lilly's point of view I felt like everything was a bit unemotional at times. Lilly is nothing if not steadfast in her ways and throws caution aside at times despite her knowing better.

I loved the old time, fairy tale feel to the whole thing, full of danger and also that pacing of writing where there is not an over amount of intricate detail, but enough to really pull you into the story. The characters, even the evil ones, had a baser nature to them, fulfilling a need by their devious ways and really becoming a bit unpredictable. Lilly seems to choose love over everything that she has been offered and makes more than one sacrifice to save her dear friend.

Final Verdict: Not a light read, but there is an assurance throughout it in knowing it is a gruesome fairy tale, one that will transport you and keep you reading on. I will definitely be looking for more of Wheeler's books in the future.

OpenBookSociety.com says

<http://openbooksociety.com/article/se...>

Brought to you by OBS reviewer Valerie

Sea Change is probably one of the most disturbing books I've ever read. I don't think it can be classified as

fantasy unless it's "fantasize about disturbing things we do for friendship." Honestly, I was horrified as I read through *Sea Change*, but hey, at least I finished it!

It's gory, creepy, scary, disgusting, and yet amazingly addicting at the same time. I felt pretty disgusted at the plot; you won't believe what Lilly goes through. Lots of simply horrifying, gory, graphic events that somehow add (or subtract) into this unbelievable story.

Lilly is quite a character. She's so strong that it hurts to read about her. She is such a great friend; I wouldn't feel worthy of her companionship. She might not have died for her friend Octavius, but she has gone through much worse. I don't know about any better character. (Sorry mom, even you can't beat Lilly!)

There's quite a bit of description as well. I could literally picture every single object and scene. I could imagine every bit of the story perfectly, and I don't even want to know if that's a good thing or not. Man, it is honestly so grotesque that I can't bear to think about it!

Guys (and gals), if you're not easily grossed out, definitely check this book out and be humbled by such a character.

Amanda says

I received a free copy of *Sea Change* from Tor in exchange for an honest review.

A fantasy bildungsroman, *Sea Change* follows the isolated, lonely and headstrong protagonist, Lilly, as she explores the limits of friendship. Born into a prosperous house to parents who fight as fiercely as they once loved, Lilly is a disappointment to her father because she is not the male heir for whom he hoped and the birthmark that blemishes half of her face ostracizes her from the townspeople who fear she is a witch. It is not until she meets Octavius, a young kraken who can appreciate the beauty of her intelligence and compassion, that Lilly finds a kindred spirit with whom she can share her innermost self. When Octavius disappears and trouble at home forces Lilly to choose loyalties, she sets off on a quest to free the only true friend she's ever known--but the price may be more than she's willing to pay.

With its dark fairy tale quality, female protagonist, and unusual take on gender roles, *Sea Change* should have been a safe bet for me. And while S.M. Wheeler certainly creates a fantastic journey for Lilly and does not shy away from the more horrific, gruesome aspects of life, the novel struck me as being somewhat uneven. The transitions that occur in Lilly's life are indeed sea changes, often abrupt and unpredictable events that turn her entire life upside down, but the result was that I often felt as though I was reading a disjointed narrative. Certain events are given too much weight (such as the lengthy interlude with the bandits, during which Lilly's original intent for being there--a bit of clever trickery on her part regarding promised wealth in exchange for her life--is forgotten for several pages), and others are sadly given too little (the kraken appears very seldom in the book and only serves as the motivation for Lilly to undertake a quest that leads to self-discovery).

I also found Wheeler's syntax and phrasing to be confusing, often cluttered or inverted for no particular reason or to any desired effect. There are also several instances where references are made to people, objects, or events as though the reader should remember them from a previous mention--which never existed. By the end, I still found myself re-reading sentences and grasping for the meaning.

Despite this, I found myself experiencing a sea change in regard to the book once Lilly set off on her quest. Whereas I found the beginning overly long and tedious, Lilly's adventures after leaving home became compelling and I looked forward to seeing what peculiar character Wheeler would introduce us to next: a skinned witch, a troll who exacts an unthinkable price, a pair of homosexual bandits (I particularly enjoyed Wheeler's depictions of sexuality and the domestic, devoted relationship between these two men--even though they were every bit as violent as *Neverwhere*'s Vandemar and Croup), the dark-wife who dines on memory, a zombie tailor whose specialty is the sought after Coat of Illusion, and many others. After a time, though, it seemed that too much was being crammed into one book. Some restraint in the number of characters may have resulted in a more streamlined narrative that was able to showcase these characters in all of their macabre and magical glory.

I look forward to reading Wheeler's next novel as there is a lot of promise in *Sea Change*, but there's also a lot of room to grow.

Cross posted at [This Insignificant Cinder](#) and at [Shelf Inflicted](#)

Kaylie says

BEST READS OF 2014

This book was beautiful, one of the best things I've read this year, and hauntingly stuck in my head. The prose was lyrical, the premise fantastically unique, and the ending gnawingly raw. Wheeler played with fairy tale themes in a way that feels familiar while introducing tales that were entirely original. I can't recommend it enough.

Heather says

There is an excerpt from this book on Tor.com and it looks amazing! I totally want a sea monster best friend.

<http://www.tor.com/stories/2013/03/se...>

Tabitha says

Peculiar in the most exceptional way! *Sea Change* captured me with its unique and old world style narrative. What do I mean by "old world" exactly? - imagine how it is to read any of the classics and that would come close to the feeling of this book except everything was mystical, magical and not a bit too unusual. Taking that into consideration this wasn't a book I could devour in one sitting but instead has to move thru at a leisurely pace. Also, be aware there are no chapters in this book! Though sections are separated by a short italicized paragraph, so there are still convenient stopping points.

We first meet Lilly at the tender age of 8, she is the only daughter of quarrelsome and not exactly living parents. Let's call them indifferent. Due to a large birthmark on her face she is viewed by everyone as a cursed child and a witch. She is spurned by almost everyone, until one day on the beach she befriends a small kraken, Octavius. We see the friendship between these two grow stronger with each passing year until when

Lilly comes off age, he disappears and she knows something terrible must have happened to keep Octavius from her.

Lilly sets off on a harrowing journey the likes of which readers may have experienced before. Her quest to save her friend leads her to meeting one strange character after another. Each encounter testing her resolve to save her friend as each person asks something of her. Fantasy readers will recognize this quest, sub quest model and appreciate it. Undoubtedly, Lilly's fortitude and strength of will is nothing short of admirable and awe inspiring in my mind. Any person would count themselves fortunate to have such a loyal friend as she.

I can only say that the books description is very adequate in preparing the prospective reader for what they can expect to encounter but at the same time that couldn't be further from the truth. It is not often that a book can elicit from me such a great range of emotion and I am all the luckier for it for deciding to read *Sea Change*. Be aware this work is literary fantasy is not for everyone, nor the faint of heart. While Lilly is a young girl embarking on a quest and coming of age story I would in no way consider this a young adult book. Also, I remember originally thinking when receiving this book that the cover design was such a strange choice, but it fit so perfectly by the end of my reading.

Sea Change is a book I will absolutely read again someday, because I know there are things that I would be better absorbed on a second pass thru. I can say this is adult fantasy at its best, and worth giving a chance. You can expect a not quite fairytale of a darkly delicious kind such as the original Grimm's tales.

FYI, I just learned there is going to be a second book!

S. M. Wheeler @SMWWrites

HARBOR: the novel in which everyone is certain that Lilly knows what's going on (even when she doesn't).

Tabitha @Pabkins

@SMWWrites So there is going to be a second!? *does a little dance that looks something like a crazed happy chimp with a bunch of bananas*

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales.

Quick & Dirty: This had a refreshing new idea, but the writing style was confusing and the story was just too slow paced for me.

Opening Sentence: Acid flowed at the table more often than wine and had long since ceased to cause Lilly alarm; her attention remained on the soup even as Father asked, "Does the thought of me still pain your head, love?"

The Review:

Lilly is the daughter of a very rich merchant, and has been spoiled her whole life. Her mother is a very beautiful woman and unfortunately Lilly did not inherit her mother's beauty. She has always been more plain and different. As a child she was very lonely and she sought comfort from the sea, where she happened to

meet her best friend, Octavius. Octavius is a baby kraken. When Lilly meets him they grow up together experiencing much together. As they grow older it is hard for them to spend as much time together since Octavius has gotten so big that he has to travel out into the ocean for weeks at a time to find food, but he always comes back to Lilly. Then one time he doesn't and it turns out he has been captured and Lilly will do anything to save her best friend. She goes on a wild adventure that takes her places she never imagined she would go and she does things she never thought she was capable of.

We get to see the story through Lilly's eyes and she was an ok character for me. She is a shy girl that always does as she is told, but as she grows she develops a subtle strongness that I really liked. She is very loyal and keeps going even though things get hard at times. She grows significantly throughout the book, which I like, I just wish I could have liked her more through the whole book. My biggest problem was that she's really not very memorable, there was nothing about her that made me really want to get to know her better. I wanted to like her more but I just couldn't bring myself to care about her like I should have.

This book was just an okay read for me. The writing style is very different and really took some getting used to. Once I adjusted, I liked the style of writing, but it was also really confusing sometimes. There were moments where I would be reading a page and I would have no idea what the people were talking about, eventually it would make sense but I had to read it two or three times before it did. Another thing was that it took forever for anything significant to happen in the story so I had a really hard time getting through it. I did enjoy the setting and some of the characters, but overall this was just an okay read. Now that being said, I am sure there will be plenty of people who really enjoy this book, so if the synopsis sounds good give it a try.

Notable Scene:

The ocean wore a pungent cologne on summer days as hot as this, but Lilly would have tolerated a rotted sardine hung around her throat for the sake of the sunlight on her skin and a breeze to brush away sweat. On a scraggy- limbed bush she hung her shoes and broad- brimmed hat and hiked her skirt to knee- height with the use of a belt.

At their beach, Octavius greeted her by thrusting a much- rusted device towards her, something alike to the inner gears of a watch, though so sorely degraded that she found it difficult to discern one piece from another. "I found it on a ship," he said, "and I cannot understand what it is."

"It seems . . ." She turned it over in her hand, careful of a sharp- edged barnacle that clung to the back.
"Something like a clock, perhaps?"

"You do not know?" He curled a tentacle around her wrist, delicately retrieving the thing. "Why, I will have to return it. A human thing at the bottom of the sea is free to whoever takes it up, but it must be the product of a different animal— one who, perhaps, meant to return to it."

"You are not a very discerning thief to have chosen this of all sunken treasures," she teased, touching the ridge of his brow; she no longer had to bend to do so. "I fear I am losing my function as your guide through the human world. Where you bring to me sights, I can only tell stories."

"But what stories they are. You approached with an expression that said you have found another worth telling." He swept a rock free of sea wrack and gestured grandly for her to sit.

FTC Advisory: Tor/Macmillan provided me with a copy of Sea Change. No goody bags, sponsorships, "material connections," or bribes were exchanged for my review.

Ren says

If you are a fan of fantasy and want a read that stands out from the crowd, you are in luck: *Sea Change* is a quirky, captivating, poetically penned "fairy tale for grown-ups." Featuring a host of fantastical characters who nonetheless maintain a gritty sense of realism, the story is a touching tale of friendship between two unlikely companions: a gentle-natured kraken, and a socially isolated girl. A dark and unflinching narrative unfolds with the help of skillful word craft that is a style all Wheeler's own - one that will no doubt have readers eager for the next installment.

Loathed and feared due to a birthmark that covers half of her face, Lilly is the emotionally neglected offspring of a crumbling marriage between two strong but selfish parents. She turns to the sea for the comfort not offered at home, where she meets a young sea monster who becomes her only childhood companion. The years do not improve her situation; she is driven from home with the arrival of a new wife and infant, and Octavius goes missing. Learning of his fate, Lilly shows readers the true meaning of friendship as she strives to free him from captivity at any cost through a harrowing series of exchanges - a skill taught by her merchant father. Along the way she finds valuable allies and powerful adversaries - ones given depth and complexity, much to the satisfaction of this often dissatisfied fantasy reader! Will she save Octavius in time? Readers will have trouble putting this one down until they have their answer!

Despite my fondness for the story, I can not say with honesty that it is for everyone. Stylistically, some readers may find it difficult; the prose is beautiful but does require focus to fully appreciate. If you want to skim through a quick, easy read, this one isn't for you. However, if you enjoy words just as much as you enjoy stories, you are in for a treat.

Overall: a deeply satisfying read, and I eagerly anticipate more from Wheeler

Alex McGilverry says

Sea Change is the story of Lilly, a girl with a birthmark on her face. She is the daughter of a trader who has become nobility, but the birthmark keeps her isolated as the people of the village think she is a witch. Her only friend is Octavius, a kraken. When Octavius is captured and sold to a circus, Lilly sets out to free him. What follows is a sequential quest. At each stage of her quest some other deed or article is demanded of her.

I struggled with this book from the beginning. Occasional paragraphs are in italics for no reason that I could discern. The style of writing is also one that distanced me from Lilly. I thought that her trials and tribulations were interesting, but I wasn't engaged. I found Octavius a much more sympathetic character. I might have worked past the odd use of italics or the disengaged character, but I found the beginning of the story very confused and dislocated. The interaction of many of the characters appeared arbitrary and inexplicable.

At the end of the story I was left with a vague feeling of disappointment. I had put in the effort needed to reach the conclusion of the story only to feel that the author had simply decided to put their pen down and walk away. It didn't make any more sense than the early parts of the book.

It is rare for me to be unable to find and redeeming qualities in a book. This book does have some interesting

characters, but they are relegated to the margins. I can not recommend this book.

Marie says

Many thanks to Macmillan-Tor/Forge for the galley copy (via NetGalley)

A lonely eight-year-old girl named Lilly encounters a young kraken on the shore and decides to name it Octavius. Their friendship has a negative correlation to her relationship with her parents: as she and Octavius grow closer, Lilly is distanced from her family, especially her father. Years later, when Octavius is captured and sold to a circus master, Lilly embarks on a journey to save her dearest friend, a quest that will transform her and comes with a heavy price.

Before you decide to read S.M. Wheeler's debut novel, I suggest checking out this lengthy excerpt from the publisher's website. The reason for this is because Ms. Wheeler's writing style is rather lyrical; that is the best way I can describe it and it could very well get in the way of someone's personal enjoyment. This type of prose is not for everyone--I admit that it took me some time to fully settle into it--but I can wholeheartedly say that the style perfectly suits the story. The descriptions were vivid and full of detail: whether the author was describing Lilly's seaside home or the skinless witch Ms. Gottschalk, conjuring up these images in my head was an easy feat--perhaps almost too easy, since I can still clearly picture the witch's oozing body of muscles, tendons, and sinew, all pink and red.

Though Lilly is already a young woman by the time she begins her rescue mission, I would still classify this as a coming of age story due to the many challenges Lilly faces on her way to save Octavius. She encounters a troll, a witch, a "dark woman," automata (which are basically re-animated dead people, but not zombies), and other humans who are nearly as dangerous as the aforementioned creatures. She is changed, literally and figuratively, throughout her crusade and she handles adversity with unflagging politeness and a quiet, unshakable strength. I kept waiting for her to break, but she doesn't. On the surface she is an atypical heroine, but her singlemindedness, determination, adaptability, loyalty, bravery, and willingness to sacrifice pretty much anything for the sake of saving her friend makes Lilly a truly remarkable character, a protagonist worth rooting for. The fact that there is a sheen of vulnerability and loneliness shrouding her tenacity makes her even more appealing.

I do have one small complaint: I felt that Lilly stayed too long with the two bandits, Mr. Duerr and Mr. Kunze. This is a minor lament, however, one that others may not agree with. Even as I worried that she would forget about Octavius the longer she remained under their service, I understood that her time with them was beneficial to her character growth. Of course, this knowledge didn't stop me from (foolishly) yelling at her to hurry, for her dear kraken could already be dead and her entire ordeal would be for naught.

With lyrical prose, an admirable protagonist, and a story that doesn't sugarcoat the hardships of sacrifice, friendship, and love, *Sea Change* is just the right offering for those who are looking for a novel with fairy tale elements written for an adult audience.

Carissa says

What a journey. This book is weird in all the best ways, and left me feeling... Bittersweet. It's a little, weird

story with all kinds of things in it that speak to me.

Fans of the writing styles of Ysabeau Wilce and Kelly Link would probably like this book. Hence, I loved it.

Brendan says

I won an ARC from tor.com. Bargain!

This is a dark, weird book that is unlike anything else I've read. I think the closest I can come to a comparison is some of the short fiction of Caitlin Kiernan. I stayed up late finishing it, and I love me some sleep. In the end, this is a book about love and friendship that raises a lot of thorny moral questions it doesn't answer. It's immersive while you're reading it and gives you a lot to chew on afterward. So, yeah, basically it's brilliant. But not necessarily for everyone. Which leads me to my only critique of this book: the marketing.

My wife spotted me reading this from across the room and said, "are you reading Eat Pray Love?" kind of derisively. So there's problem number one. Then there's the blurb, above. When I got to "in Octavius' many arms..." I nearly didn't open the book. It sounds like some cheeseball beauty and the beast love story, and while it's about love, it also features skinless witches and undead tailors and a particularly gruesome and transformative encounter with a troll. I applaud Tor for taking a chance on this book, but I'm really afraid that the promotion is going to backfire. Trying to make this look like the fantasy Eat Pray Love is going to turn off readers who would love this book, and the book itself is far too weird for people who think they're getting a gentle love story.

But the book is fantastic, and as long as you're okay with the skinless witches and gruesome troll encounters and such, I highly recommend it.

Lexie says

I have to be honest I was so apprehensive to start reading Sea Change because our main character Lilly is so young. I usually try to read books where the characters are closer to my age range. Because I find that I connect more personally with characters that are closer to my age. But after reading the first chapter of Sea Change I knew I would have no problems with the age difference. Sea Change is about Lilly's relationship with a kraken named Octavius. Lilly forms a very close bond with the kraken due to her parent's distance to her. Then Octavius is kidnapped and Lilly decides to go after her childhood friend and rescue him.

I loved Lilly's character, she definitely acts older than her years. Which is one of the reasons why I connected with her so well. I also felt sympathetic toward Lilly's journey, especially because of her cruel parents. My favorite aspect of the book was Lilly & Octavius relationship. I was totally captivated by the friendship between the two since the first chapter.

Then the novel shifts to all-out fantasy and stays that way throughout the bulk of the story. I've read many fantasy books, but never one with such great detail. I literally could picture the world and adventures Lilly went on. But this was also a challenge for me. Because of this book being a more high-end of fantasy I had to pay very close attention and keep up with what was going on and why. This book literally had all aspects of fantasy which I never expected. Along with our kraken friend we also got to be read about trolls, witches, and the undead. Giving way to some complicated and unexpected detours that make Lilly's quest all the more epic. And I loved the ending. It didn't leave me with any questions and it left me feeling hopeful.

For those who enjoy fantasy and literary fiction, you won't want to miss this debut novel. Also, a small warning for the more queasy readers this is a very blood/gory book and sometimes it gets a little tough to read. But it wasn't uncomfortable or awkward to read.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. I did not receive any other compensation for this review.

Van (Short & Sweet Reviews) says

3 1/2 stars.

SEA CHANGE is not your typical children's' fairytale. Upon reading the synopsis for the book, I was expecting a much tame happy-ever-after type of book. Let me tell you, I was surprised to find out that SEA CHANGE is more The Brothers Grimm than sugar coated Disney. The story started out pretty simple, a girl name Lily is mistreated by her evil parents but finds happiness and comfort in her friend Octavius who happens to be a kraken (yes folks, the sea monster). Octavius, Lily's only friend and the person she most cares about in the entire world gets captured by a greedy circus master. In order to save Octavius, Lily must retrieve a magical coat that changes ones appearance.

Lily is one of the youngest and strongest characters I've ever read. Lily is only sixteen (at the start of the book) and the thing she goes through in SEA CHANGE is something no teen should ever go through. She loses the most important part of her that makes her a young woman, and then finds herself in servitude to a witch and a couple of vicious-dangerous bandits. Lily risks everything to save Octavius. Their friendship and loyalty to one another is beyond amazing because she goes further than the call of friendship responsibility. The obstacle that Lily faces not only changes her life, but also transforms her as a person...going from childhood to adulthood.

SEA CHANGE was definitely not my usual read; it was darker and more sinister than I expected. It is one part beautiful lyrical-poetic prose and another part weird and disturbingly detailed. Sea Change is certainly written for a more mature/adult audience. I highly recommend SEA CHANGE to those looking for a different, multilayered fantasy that evokes intellectual-deep thinking. SEA CHANGE is not for the faint of heart or someone looking for an easy-light read. I am curious to see more of S.M. Wells work, and will be on the lookout for any book published by her in the future.
