

# Breathe

Kae Tempest

When I stand at the mic, the whole world I have known  
Is contained in the breath before speaking  
My life condensed to a sentence  
I'm just trying to be someone the child I used to be could believe in  
Breathe in  
Odd kid getting even  
The evening's a dream that the morning can't sleep through  
A day in the life or a life full of daze  
I started to write when my life was a maze I was lost in  
Looking for a way out of the ways I didn't want  
But what you want isn't something you can choose, it chooses you  
What are you?  
That was the question, but what was the answer?  
Trying to make sense was a senseless endeavour  
Head down  
Stick to the plan  
The plan was sit down with a pen in your hand  
What I found when I picked up the mic was profound  
New ground, the soundworld was basslines  
And sticking my head in the bassbins at raves was elation  
Saved by the act of creation  
Snatched from the jaws of destruction  
The crossroads were clear, write or go under  
Yeah, it was messy for a minute  
The only thing that made sense was my lyrics  
And I was in the rave fighting demons  
When the boy got stabbed, started bleeding  
And I was so high that I couldn't even help him  
I just stared at the blood on my trainers for ages  
Sat down in the corner, waiting for what?  
Once something's happened you can't make it stop  
Five years later, Alfie got shot in the stomach, I should have been there, but I wasn't  
What are you made of, how many selves do you carry?  
How many hells must a person inhabit before they can see their life hangs in the balance  
If you want it, eventually you've got to make it happen or it swallows you into its folds  
A rogue planet exploding but on the outside, I was nothing  
Too big for the city I lived in  
My spirit was hurting for something I couldn't determine  
My body was alien to me  
Persuaded myself that rhyming would lift me out of the cage I was trapped in  
Back when I used to spit bars at the bus stop  
Cap down, hood up  
Clap twice, wake up later, stage fright, shaking  
Taking questions from someone from the paper  
When did I become a writer?  
I was just a drunk with a bag and a lighter  
You are what you do repeatedly  
You are who the people see but I was shook  
When my friends were fucking girls, I was sitting in the corner, scribbling in my book  
Too stoned to get up, too scared to look at the mess of my heart-scape  
Bright lights dark place  
Thinking I'm gonna make it one day  
Hiding in plain sight, rhyming to take flight

And leave my numbness behind  
Up there on the stage, wasn't bound by the same rules that drowned me  
The days poured down and the nights were loud  
Blink twice and the world disappeared  
Six weeks on the road and it's ringing in my ears  
Beers for fears, beers for tears for years  
My body was made out of a million stars  
Everybody down had dropped, and everybody danced  
I was in the van on tour, when my ex-wife said I can't do it anymore  
I never went home just kept settling the score  
With a mic in my hand and a song to roar  
Dysphoria  
Didn't know the name or the symptoms  
Going through the motions trying to fit it all in  
I was touring three shows  
Trying to draft a novel looking out the windows at the motorway  
How do I tell my story?  
It don't begin and end with me  
My story is my folks, folks, coming into London looking for a way to be free  
My story is my sisters kids with the listless edge  
I recognise attention deficit  
Head in five thoughts at the same time  
I take my place in the long line of people  
Whose voices shake in my voice when I raise my voice  
To say my words  
Eighty thousand people in a field, holding up my mic like a shield  
Holding up the mic like a shield, it's real  
I used to be a boy when I was young  
Then I hit puberty, I had to be a girl  
I really, really tried to become  
Someone who belonged in the world  
And then it really started kicking off with work  
I was writing like I'd been desperate to do  
So many people couldn't live a dream or live a minute  
Without screaming for the troubles they were carrying within them  
And here I was travelling the world and being asked for my opinion  
But inside was a cavern bigger than the solar system  
I was different, I could feel it, I was different  
It was killing every sensation, it was hidden  
It was taking up too much room, it was gripping my windpipe and stopping my words  
I was on stage giving people my heart  
But my heart was even concerned  
My heart was alone in the dark of my ribs  
Trying to talk me into doing what eventually I did  
What's the story here?  
Live your fucking life because no one's going to know  
If you kept it all inside, when you lose the will to go another day, another night  
Everything has changed  
And everyone I am is everyone I'm made of  
And everyone I'm made of is everyone I loved and everyone I've loved is everyone I judged  
Like they weren't going to love me if they knew what I was, but what was I?  
Neither and both  
Getting closer to myself and time, now, I've finally spoken my mind and the child I was  
Sitting there writing rhymes to eternity, can put down their pen and believe in me  
The child I was, writing rhymes to eternity can put down their pen and believe  
Breathe