

Dan Bern, Estelle

I was painting a still life this morning
Of a throat lozenge sitting on a copy
Of Tropic of Cancer
The only thing weird about it
Is that a year ago,
I never thought I'd paint anything again
I decided I wasn't ever gonna paint again
It didn't bother me too much
Warhol's dead,
David Hockney's still alive
I don't need to paint
I painted over ten thousand paintings
Sad ones, funny ones, dark ones, and light ones
I've done haystacks
And rich old ladies by their pools
Wearing nothing but a scarf
I've painted everything there was to paint
Now it was time to sit back
Give interviews
Hang out at club med
Get on the internet
Take stock of what I've done
You know, the best friend I ever had was a dog
It sounds like a cliché unless it's happened to you
Some days that dog was the only reason I even got out of bed
That dog went everywhere with me
And then I heard the crack addicts
Were stealin' dogs and selling them for animal research
It sounded like an urban myth to me
Like the mouse in the Coke bottle
But I started leavin' her at home after that
You know, Paula was my wife for a while
She ran off to Paris with the great grandson of Van Gogh
A cartoonist who did fashion graphics for Le Monde
When Paula left she took my dog
I never saw her again
Except in the court during the custody battle
She won and got to keep the dog
And I didn't speak to anyone for months
You know sometimes it feels
Like there's so much that you need
Sometimes the world is upside down
Sometimes it feels
Like the only thing you need
Is holdin' someone's hand as you walk through town
I started hanging around with Dino
He used to run a poker game back east
Now he sells cappuccino to his old pals
Tommy Chicago and Jimmy the Wig and Ugly Rose
You know the best person I ever knew
Was a Mormon woman named Estelle
She still calls me drunk every few months
And asks me stuff I don't want to talk about
You can't talk to her very long unless you're drunk yourself
Then we go all night
She says, "Why baby, why baby, why baby, why
Have you turned your back on love?
You had so many chances
Why have you let 'em all go by?"
Well, one morning I was sitting in front of Dino's place
with Jake the Shears, a guy from Philly
Who gives free mohawks
There were a couple of young painters
I was hopin' to come by

So I could give 'em some advice
Yeah, I was sittin' there updating my list of enemies
When this girl walks in
And the universe kind of stops
Turned out she drank the same tea as me
It don't take more than that to start a conversation sometimes
She believed collage was the greatest of all the arts
And was busy pasting pictures of horses
Next to ads for laundry soap
Next to Mohammed Ali
She had a turquoise in her ear
And said Rachmaninoff was always in her head
Later that day I was trying to describe her to Jimmy the Wig
I couldn't find any words
And I realized I'd started to sketch her chin
Somehow it didn't look right
I scratched it out and tried it again
I filled an entire pad
I threw it away, I never even came close
For six days I sat at Dino's place
The rain wouldn't quit and no one came in
Finally on the seventh day it cleared
And in she walked
I asked her to sit with me
And I bought her a cup of tea
And I asked her to model for me sometime
That afternoon I was at a canvas
She was wearing a yellow dress
I swore if she let me, I'd get it right
I've painted over ten thousand paintings
Sad ones, funny ones, dark ones, and light ones
But sitting there, it was like I couldn't even
Write my own name
I apologized and said, "It's been a few months
If you have patience, I'll get the hang of it again"
In the next few weeks, I painted her hundreds of times
If I get the nose right, the chin's too long
If I get 'em both right, the face is too thin
But I keep after it and one day
I get it all right
I painted a still life this morning
Of a throat lozenge
sitting on a copy of Tropic of Cancer
The only weird thing about it
Is I never thought
I'd paint anything again
I think I might go visit Estelle
Those Utah mountains are good for the soul
I'll bring my brushes
And some Jack Daniels
And we can make up for lost time
She said, "Why baby, why baby, why baby why?
Have you turned your back on love
You had so many chances
Why do you let 'em all go by?
Why baby, why baby, why baby why?
Have you turned your back on love
You had so many chances
Why do you let 'em all go by?"
Sometimes it seems like there's so much that you need
Sometimes the world is upside down
Sometimes it seems like the only thing you need
Is holdin' someone's hand as you walk through town