

# 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