

This Is Just To Say

One Hundred Variations on a Theme
by
William Carlos Williams

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Introduction of the Theme

I was sitting in my study listening to Mozart's variations on "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" and reading a volume of William Carlos Williams' poetry. When I turned the page, my eyes lighted on this poem:

This Is Just To Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

At once I thought, if Mozart could write variations on music, why not write variations on poetry as well? I whipped out my ballpoint and scratchpad and feverishly penned the following 100 variations.

Variation No. 1
Automotive

This Is Just To Say

I have taken
your car
that stood in
the driveway

and which
you were probably
planning
to leave in

Forgive me
it was convenient
so near
and so fast

Variation No. 2
Economic

This Is Just To Say

I have borrowed
the cash
you left on
your dresser

and which
you were probably
needing
for lunchtime

Forgive me
it was enticing
so green
and so crisp

Variation No. 3
Postal

This Is Just To Say

I have opened
your mail
that lay on
the table

and which
you were probably
thinking
was private

Forgive me
it was inviting
so white
and so sealed

Variation No. 4
Cerevisial*

This Is Just To Say

I have gone to
the store
to get what
you told me

and what
you had probably
thought I'd
remember

Forgive me
but I just bought beer
so cold
and so gold

*(*cerevisia* = beer)

Variation No. 5
Otiant*

This Is Just To Say

I had offered
to help
the kids with
their homework

so that
you could probably
find peace
and quiet

Forgive me
I'm watching TV
so set
and so snug

*(*otians* = at leisure)

Variation No. 6
Oblivious

This Is Just To Say

I've forgotten
again
(like last year)
your birthday

on which
you had probably
hoped for
a present

Forgive me
I'm just forgetful
so hazed
and so dazed

Variation No. 7
Matutinal*

This Is Just To Say

I have turned off
the clock
that was to
awake you

and now
you will probably
miss your
big meeting

Forgive me
you'll get the axe now
so rushed
but so late

*(*matutinus* = pertaining to the morning)

Variation No. 8
Technological

This Is Just To Say

I've erased all
the disks
beside your
computer

on which
you were probably
saving
your life's work

Forgive me
now they are empty
so bare
and so blank

Variation No. 9
Avicultural*

This Is Just To Say

I have opened
the cage
that housed both
your finches

the ones
you had probably
relished
the songs of

Forgive me
now they are catfood
so sweet
and so plump

*(*avis* = bird; *cultura* = cultivation)

Variation No. 10
Bibliothecarian*

This Is Just To Say

I have dumped out
the books
you placed in
your bookcase

and which
you had probably
lined up
precisely

Forgive me
I am just sloppy
so loose
and so lax

*(*bibliotheca* = a library; *bibliothecarius* = pertaining to a library)

Variation No. 11
Agonistic*

This Is Just To Say

I have cancelled
our plans
to leave for
the weekend

a time
you had probably
thought so
romantic

Forgive me
there's a big game on
such plays
and such moves

*(*agôn* = a contest; *agônistikos* = relating to a contest)

Variation No. 12
Arboreal*

This Is Just To Say

I have chopped down
the tree
that grew by
your window

and which
you had probably
gazed on
each morning

Forgive me
it was for toothpicks
so slim
and so short

*(*arbor* = a tree; *arboreus* = relating to a tree)

Variation No. 13
Figural

This Is Just To Say

I have burned all
the bras
you fold in
your dresser

with which
you have probably
bolstered
slack bosoms

Forgive me
they're liberated
so loose
and so free

Variation No. 14
Oratorical

This Is Just To Say

I have hidden
the mike
that stood on
the rostrum

with which
you'd have probably
given
your lecture

Forgive me
your voice is cracking
so stressed
and so strained

Variation No. 15
Photogenic

This Is Just To Say

I have caught you
on film
in all of
your glory

just when
you had probably
stepped from
the shower

Forgive me
you are in *Playboy*
so nude
and so nice

Variation No. 16
Pneumatic

This Is Just To Say

I have let out
the air
from all four
of your tires

on which
you'd have probably
ridden
quite smoothly

Forgive me
now you just sit there
so still
and so stalled

Variation No. 17
Pecuniary*

This Is Just To Say

I have drawn out
the funds
you'd logged in
your bankbook

and which
you'd have probably
paid off
your bills with

Forgive me
I found your balance
so high
and so full

*(*pecunia* = money; *pecuniarius* = relating to money)

Variation No. 18
Novelesque

This Is Just To Say

I have ripped the
last page
from what you
are reading

so now
you are probably
missing
the climax

Forgive me
it was exciting
so strange
yet so true

Variation No. 19
Oenological*

This Is Just To Say

I have drunk all
the wine
we have in
the cellar

and which
you were probably
saving
for New Year's

Forgive me
I'm alcoholic
so drunk
and so glad

*(*oinos* = wine)

Variation No. 20
Veneriel*

This Is Just To Say

I said I would
clean out
the attic
this weekend

in which
you'd have probably
put things
in storage

Forgive me
I have gone hunting
so rough
and so wild

*(*venerius* = relating to hunting)

Variation No. 21
Confectionary

This Is Just To Say

I bought you some
sweets for
Saint Valen-
tine's feastday

and as
you could probably
guess they
were chocolate

Forgive me
they are all gone now
so dark
and so rich

Variation No. 22
Calendarial

This Is Just To Say

I have blacked out
the days
and times of
your datebook

with which
you'd have probably
kept your
appointments

Forgive me
you can stay home now
so bleak
and so blue

Variation No. 23
Ceramic

This Is Just To Say

I have broken
the vase
in front of
the mirror

the one
you had probably
valued
as priceless

Forgive me
now there are fragments
so small
and so sharp

Variation No. 24
Piscicultural*

This Is Just To Say

I have emptied
the tank
that held all
your goldfish

the ones
you had probably
joyed in
the sight of

Forgive me
they are decaying
so rank
and so foul

*(*piscis* = fish; *cultura* = cultivation)

Variation No. 25
Tapetal*

This Is Just To Say

I have spilled all
my port
upon your
white carpet

on which
you had probably
not put
the Scotchguard

Forgive me
it's like a crime scene
so stained
and so red

*(*tapeta* = rug)

Variation No. 26
Courtly

This Is Just To Say

I have broken
the date
for which we
had tickets

for which
you had probably
bought a
new outfit

Forgive me
I was out drinking
so hard
and so late

Variation No. 27
Floricultural*

This Is Just To Say

I have driven
my car
right over
the rosebeds

the ones
you had probably
laid out
so nicely

Forgive me
now there are ruts there
so deep
and so wide

*(*flos* = flower; *cultura* = cultivation)

Variation No. 28
Nacreous*

This Is Just To Say

I have broken
the strand
of pearls on
your necklace

those which
you had probably
worn at
our wedding

Forgive me
many got stepped on
so smooth
and so frail

*(arabic *naqqâra*, medieval Latin *nacrum* = mother of pearl)

Variation No. 29
Iago-like

This Is Just To Say

I have told your
best friend
you slept with
her husband

a man
you would probably
not find
attractive

Forgive me
she will take vengeance
so swift
and so sure

Variation No. 30
Caligate*

This Is Just To Say

I have scuffed up
the floors
you spent all
day waxing

and which
you had probably
guessed would
stay shiny

Forgive me
boots are just clunky
so heeled
and so blacked

*(*caligae* = military boots)

Variation No. 31
Telesexual

This Is Just To Say

I have switched all
your phones
to "nine hun-
dred" numbers

on which
you will probably
get your
new clients

Forgive me
they will be dirty
so lewd
and so low

Variation No. 32
Accidental

This Is Just To Say

I have totaled
the car
that you have
just paid for

and which
you'd have probably
driven
a decade

Forgive me
now it is scrap iron
so crushed
and so crunched

Variation No. 33
Financial

This Is Just To Say

I have sold off
the stocks
in which you
invested

and which
you had probably
meant for
retirement

Forgive me
it's a bull's market
so rich
and so fat

Variation No. 34
Philatelic*

This Is Just To Say

I have steamed off
the stamps
on all of
your letters

the ones
you had probably
thought I
was mailing

Forgive me
they will not get there
no way
and no how

*(*philos* = a liking for; *ateleia* = exemption from [postal] charges; relating to stamp collecting)

Variation No. 35
Frigorific*

This Is Just To Say

I have unplugged
the cord
that goes to
the freezer

in which
you had probably
frozen
some dinners

Forgive me
now they are mushy
so sopped
and so sogged

*(*frigorificus* = producing cold)

Variation No. 36
Halieutic*

This Is Just To Say

I promised to
help with
my share of
the housework

of which
you are probably
getting
so weary

Forgive me
I have gone fishing
so blithe
and so free

*(*halieutikos* = relating to fishing)

Variation No. 37
Yuletidal

This Is Just To Say

I had bought you
a gift
but since have
returned it

it's just
what you're probably
wanting
for Christmas

Forgive me
your box will be empty
so big
and so void

Variation No. 38
Capillary*

This Is Just To Say

I have shaved off
your hair
while still you
lay sleeping

the hair
you were probably
rightly
so proud of

Forgive me
you have a chrome dome
so slick
and so sleek

*(*capillus* = hair; *capillaris* = relating to the hair)

Variation No. 39
Antiquarian

This Is Just To Say

I have smashed up
your set
of antique
French china

on which
you were probably
serving
this Friday

Forgive me
it was outdated
so quaint
and so old

Variation No. 40
Ophidian*

This Is Just To Say

I have hidden
a snake
beneath your
bed covers

between
which you probably
slipped un-
suspecting

Forgive me
it has just bitten
so coiled
and so fanged

*(*ophis* = snake)

Variation No. 41
Sordidous*

This Is Just To Say

I have messed up
the house
you spent the
week cleaning

and which
you had probably
thought would
stay tidy

Forgive me
men are just like that
so crude
and so crass

*(*sordidus* = dirty)

Variation No. 42
Servitudinous*

This Is Just To Say

I've decided
we won't
go out to
have dinner

although
you would probably
rather
not fix it

Forgive me,
slave of the hot stove,
so balled
and so chained

*(*servitudo* = slavery)

Variation No. 43
Horticultural*

This Is Just To Say

I have pulled up
the blooms
you tend in
your garden

with which
you'd have probably
made an
arrangement

Forgive me
they have all shriveled
so dry
and so stale

*(*hortus* = garden; *cultura* = cultivation)

Variation No. 44
Marsupial*

This Is Just To Say

I have dumped out
your purse
right into
the trashcan

the one
you had probably
kept all
your stuff in

Forgive me
now you are needy
so poor
and so lost

*(*marsupion* = pouch or small purse)

Variation No. 45
Felonious

This Is Just To Say

I have framed you
for crimes
that I have
committed

and which
you would probably
never
have stooped to

Forgive me
you are in prison
so cooped
and so caged

*(medieval Latin *felo* = something galling)

Variation No. 46
Amical

This Is Just To Say

I have slept with
your friend
who worked in
my office

and whom
you had probably
trusted
as faithful

Forgive me
she was seductive
so full
and so firm

Variation No. 47
Electrical

This Is Just To Say

I have thrown in
the trash
your light bill
for April

one which
you'd have probably
paid off
by May first

Forgive me
you're in the dark now
so pitch
and so black

Variation No. 48
Paternal

This Is Just To Say

I have pommeled
your dad
who dropped by
to visit

and whom
you were probably
waiting
to chat with

Forgive me
he was nitpicking
so proud
and so snide

Variation No. 49
Ovular

This Is Just To Say

I have taken
the eggs
you had in
the icebox

with which
you'd have probably
cooked up
an omelette

Forgive me
your car is splattered
so shelled
and so yolked

Variation No. 50
Annular*

This Is Just To Say

I have pawned off
the ring
you left on
the nightstand

and which
you most probably
often
had flaunted

Forgive me
it was expensive
so gemmed
and so gold

*(*anulus* = a ring; *anularis* = relating to a ring)

Variation No. 51
Residential

This Is Just To Say

I have changed your
address
at every
post office

and so
you will probably
get no
more letters

Forgive me
they seemed like junk mail
so dry
and so dull

Variation No. 52
Fornacic*

This Is Just To Say

I have turned up
the heat
control of
your oven

in which
you were probably
fixing
gourmet food

Forgive me
now it is cinders
so crisp
and so charred

*(*fornax* = an oven; *fornacalis* = relating to an oven)

Variation No. 53
Aleatory*

This Is Just To Say

I had promised
to save
my bonus
from Christmas

which thus
you had probably
deemed would
draw interest

Forgive me
I'm in Las Vegas
so down
and so out

*(*alea* = a game of chance; *aleatorius* = relating to a gambler)

Variation No. 54
Caseiform*

This Is Just To Say

I've been feeding
the kids
while you were
away, dear

with meals
you had probably
thought were
nutritious

Forgive me
they like their Cheetos
so cheesed
and so greased

*(*caseus* = cheese)

Variation No. 55
Custodial

This Is Just To Say

I have had you
declared
unfit as
a mother

for which
you will probably
lose all
your children

Forgive me
they will forget you
so quick
and so well

Variation No. 56
Chronometric

This Is Just To Say

I have shattered
your clock
that sat on
the mantle

and which
you'd have probably
cherished
forever

Forgive me
it was annoying
it ticked
and it tocked

Variation No. 57
Feline

This Is Just To Say

I have gutted
the cat
you raised from
a kitten

and which
you had probably
thought was
so cuddly

Forgive me
I strung my banjo
so tight
and so taut

Variation No. 58
Lavatorial*

This Is Just To Say

I've severed the
clothesline
you hung out
the wash on

the load
you had probably
dreamed would
smell springlike

Forgive me
dogs have attacked it
what shreds
and what scraps

*(*lavare* = to wash)

Variation No. 59
Millinery*

This Is Just To Say

I have trampled
the hat
you purchased
for Easter

with which
you'd have probably
topped off
your outfit

Forgive me
it is a pancake
so thin
and so flat

*(*milliner* = originally a vendor of goods from Milan; relating to women's hats)

Variation No. 60
Libelous

This Is Just To Say

I have slandered
your name
through all of
the papers

in which
you'd have probably
never
been mentioned

Forgive me
you have been muddied
so mucked
and so mired

Variation No. 61
Geminate*

This Is Just To Say

I'm spending the
night with
a couple
of bimbos

and so
you should probably
wait up
no longer

Forgive me
double is better
so mixed
and so matched

*(*geminus* = twin, double)

Variation No. 62
Aquatic

This Is Just To Say

I have cut off
the main
that brings you
your water

of which
you'd have probably
drunk from
the faucet

Forgive me
you are so thirsty
so parched
and so pale

Variation No. 63
Mercenary

This Is Just To Say

I have auctioned
our child
among the
slave traders

the one
you'd have probably
sent off
to college

Forgive me
she's worth a fortune
so young
and so fresh

Variation No. 64
Deceleratory*

This Is Just To Say

I have drained from
your car
each drop of
brake fluid

and so
you are probably
racing
downhill now

Forgive me
you will be crashing
so hard
and so fast

*(*de* = down from; *celerare* = to accelerate)

Variation No. 65
Academic

This Is Just To Say

I have torn up
the notes
you took in
your classes

and which
you would probably
study
for finals

Forgive me
you will be failing
so sure
and so bad

Variation No. 66
Pharmacological

This Is Just To Say

I have thrown out
the pills
the doctor
prescribed you

and which
would have probably
healed your
condition

Forgive me
they seemed a trifle
so small
and so round

Variation No. 67
Mappamundial*

This Is Just To Say

I've taken an
interest
in things ge-
ographic

in sights
you have probably
never
imagined

Forgive me
I've gone exploring
so far
and so wide

*(*mappa mundi* = map of the world)

Variation No. 68
Pannial*

This Is Just To Say

I've used the last
diaper
to wipe up
an oil spill

one which
you were probably
storing
for Junior

Forgive me
it was absorbent
so soft
and so white

*(*pannus* = a piece of cloth)

Variation No. 69
Incompetent

This Is Just To Say

I have had you
pronounced,
dear, *non com-
pos mentis*

for which
you will probably
forfeit
your heirship

Forgive me
all will be mine now
so much
and so soon

Variation No. 70
Instrumental

This Is Just To Say

I have bent up
the flute
you kept in
your flutecase

on which
you were probably
meaning
to practice

Forgive me
it was atonal
so sharp
and so flat

Variation No. 71
Telephonic

This Is Just To Say

I have ripped out
the phone
you had in
the kitchen

and which
you'd have probably
talked to
your friends on

Forgive
it had been ringing
so high
and so shrill

Variation No. 72
Canine

This Is Just To Say

I have butchered
your dog
who frisked in
the hallway

and whom
you were probably
wanting
to play with

Forgive me
he had been barking
so loud
and so long

Variation No. 73
Sedentary

This Is Just To Say

I have slashed up
your chair
in front of
the fireplace

in which
you'd have probably
browsed through
the paper

Forgive me
here is the stuffing
so soft
and so plush

Variation No. 74
Eleemosynary*

This Is Just To Say

I have given
your clothes
to Salva-
tion Army

the ones
you'd have probably
put on
this morning

Forgive me
now you are naked
so buff
and so bare

*(*eleemosyna* = a charitable gift, an alms)

Variation No. 75
Calumnious*

This Is Just To Say

I have gossiped
of you
to all of
your neighbors

with whom
you had probably
such a
good standing

Forgive me
now they all hate you
so deep
and so much

*(*calumnia* = a false accusation)

Variation No. 76
Calorific*

This Is Just To Say

I have cut off
the heat
that flows to
your quarters

with which
you'd have probably
kept warm
this winter

Forgive me
now you are freezing
so stiff
and so numb

*(*calorificus* = producing heat)

Variation No. 77
Maternal

This Is Just To Say

I have murdered
your mom
who stayed in
our guestroom

and whom
you had probably
hoped to
spend time with

Forgive me
she was complaining
of this
and of that

Variation No. 78
Epistolary*

This Is Just To Say

I have sent you
a file
to open
by e-mail

and which
you will probably
download
this morning

Forgive me
it has a virus
so strong
and so vile

*(*epistola* = a letter; *epistolaris* = relating to a letter)

Variation No. 79
Tropical

This Is Just To Say

I have gone on
our dream
vacation
without you

one which
you had probably
long been
awaiting

Forgive me
I'm in St. Thomas
so oiled
and so tanned

Variation No. 80
Creditorial

This Is Just To Say

I have cancelled
your cards
with all of
your credit

with which
you would probably
run through
the sale days

Forgive me
They were just plastic
so cheap
and so fake

Variation No. 81
Abductional

This Is Just To Say

I was watching
the kids
I took to
the playground

a place
you'd have probably
not picked
for napping

Forgive me
they have been kidnapped
so weak
and so young

Variation No. 82
Photographic

This Is Just To Say

I have ripped up
the book
with all of
your photos

the shots
that were probably
keepsakes
from childhood

Forgive me
now they are tatters
so black
and so white

Variation No. 83
Cultellary*

This Is Just To Say

I have brought you
some fruit
in which I
hid razors

and which
you have probably
bitten
right into

Forgive me
your tongue is bleeding
so slit
and so sliced

*(*cultellus* = a little knife)

Variation No. 84
Ornamental

This Is Just To Say

I have thrown out
your brooch,
your heirloom
from grandma,

though it
was quite probably
your sole
memento

Forgive me
she was an ogress
so mean
and so mad

Variation No. 85
Balneatory*

This Is Just To Say

I have bolted
the door
and turned up
the sauna

in which
you were probably
calmly
relaxing

Forgive me
now you are fainting
so limp
and so light

*(*balneae* = a bathing place; *balnearius* = relating to a bath)

Variation No. 86
Funereal*

This Is Just To Say

I have dug up
the grave
you buried
your mom in

and where
you'd have probably
gone to
lay flowers

Forgive me
her bones have no flesh now
so blanched
and so clean

*(*funus* = a burial; *funereus* = relating to a burial)

Variation No. 87
Archival

This Is Just To Say

I have shredded
the files
that held all
your papers

and which
you had probably
indexed
for tax time

Forgive me
now they are slivers
so thin
and so light

Variation No. 88
Adventurous

This Is Just To Say

I have left for
a year
to seek out
my fortune

and so
you will probably
fend for
the children

Forgive me
it's an adventure
so new
and so near

Variation No. 89
Optometric

This Is Just To Say

I have stomped on
the case
containing
your glasses

and now
you have probably
clashed with
a doorpost

Forgive me
your nose is broken
so bent
and so bruised

Variation No. 90
Detersive*

This Is Just To Say

I have coated
with soap
the floor of
your bathroom

in which
you were probably
going
to shower

Forgive me
you slipped and fell there
so black
and so blue

*(*detergere* = to clean by wiping)

Variation No. 91
Atmospheric

This Is Just To Say

I've polluted
the air
you breathe in
your study

although
you will probably
not smell
the toxins

Forgive me
now you are choking
so gagged
and so scragged

Variation No. 92
Autobiographical

This Is Just To Say

I have torn out
each page
you wrote in
your diary

and which
you were probably
keeping
a secret

Forgive me
it's on my website
so trite
and so tired

Variation No. 93
Pigritudinous*

This Is Just To Say

I'm quitting the
job that
put food on
the table

your chil-
dren will probably
have to
go hungry

Forgive me
I am just lazy
so slow
and so slack

*(*pigritudo* = laziness)

Variation No. 94
Januan*

This Is Just To Say

I have switched out
the locks
at all of
the doorways

the ones
you are probably
seeking
a key to

Forgive me
night is approaching
so cold
and so dark

*(*janua* = a door)

Variation No. 95
Piscinal*

This Is Just To Say

I have drained out
the pool
in which you
are diving

in which
you will probably
fracture
your skull bone

Forgive me
I hate the water
so clear
and so wet

(*piscina* = a pool)

Variation No. 96
Minatory*

This Is Just To Say

I've called in a
bomb threat
and grounded
the airplane

in which
you were probably
ready
for takeoff

Forgive me
you've been left stranded
so high
and so dry

*(*minari* = to threaten; late Latin *minatorius* = threatening)

Variation No. 97
Luminous

This Is Just To Say

I have shot out
the lamp
up over
the entrance

on which
you were probably
counting
for safety

Forgive me
here come the muggers
so fierce
and so mean

Variation No. 98
Domestic

This Is Just To Say

I have burned down
our house
which stood on
the corner

and which
you had probably
counted
your castle

Forgive me
now it is ashes
so fine
and so black

Variation No. 99
Culinary

This Is Just To Say

I have poisoned
the food
that you have
just eaten

with which
you have probably
sated
your hunger

Forgive me
now you are lifeless
so cold
and so dead

Variation No. 100
Dedicatory

This Is Just To Say

I have written
this book
composed in
your honor

although
you will probably
not be
immortal

Forgive me
fame is not lasting
so here
then so gone

This troubled some of the other poets at the time but others welcomed the break away from the boring rhymed lines of formal convention. This Is Just To Say is a snippet of domestic news that eventually went viral thanks to the brevity, plain language and novel approach to form and line. It was intended for just one person but is universal in its appeal. Further Analysis - Form And Lineation in This Is Just To Say. The form and lineation are crucial to the success of this little poem. Short lines need to be read with care, as lack of rhyme and rhythm tend to make the reader wary. If you're