This Is Just To Say

One Hundred Variations on a Theme
by
William Carlos Williams

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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.
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
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
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
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)*
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)
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
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)*
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
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)*
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; bibliotecarius = 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)*
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
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
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
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
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)*
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
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)*
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

*(venereus = relating to hunting)*
This Is Just To Say

I bought you some sweets for Saint Valentine's feastday

and as you could probably guess they were chocolate

Forgive me they are all gone now so dark and so rich
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
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
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)*
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)*
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)
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
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)*
This Is Just To Say

I have switched all your phones to “nine hundred” numbers

on which you will probably get your new clients

Forgive me they will be dirty so lewd and so low
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
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
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)*
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)*
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)*
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
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)*
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
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)*
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)*
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)*
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)*
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)*
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
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
This Is Just To Say

I have pommelled
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
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
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)*
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
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)*
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)*
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)*
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.
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
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
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)*
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)*
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)
This Is Just To Say

I have cut off
the main
that brings you
your water

of which
you'd have probably
drank 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
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)*
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
This Is Just To Say

I've taken an interest in things geographic in sights you have probably never imagined

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

*(mappa mundi = map of the world)*
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)
This Is Just To Say

I have had you pronounced, dear, *non compos mentis*

for which you will probably forfeit your heirship

Forgive me all will be mine now so much and so soon
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
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
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
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
This Is Just To Say

I have given
your clothes
to Salvation 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)*
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)*
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)
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
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)*
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
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
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
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
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)*
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
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)*
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)*
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
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
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)*
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
This Is Just To Say

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

your children will probably have to go hungry

Forgive me
I am just lazy so slow and so slack

*(pigritudo = laziness)*
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)*
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)
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)*
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
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
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
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