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Dear Woody,

As I know Jeffrey has told you, I really enjoyed our conversation on the plane last spring about William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Say." You offered a reading of the poem that seemed to me completely persuasive and plausible and, yet, also, one that is not strictly dictated or delimited by the lines themselves. These are lines that seem to me unusually open to divergent readings-- including, for instance, a reading much more coaxing and seductive; another, much more defensive and manipulative; another, much more about language itself as a mode of sharing. I left our conversation wanting to explore with you the aggressive (or maybe mock aggressive) reading you gave, as well as the way this poem, perhaps more than many, sustains so many readings. You helped me think about Williams's poem as it seems in some ways more like a "script" than a poem, a poem written in such a way as to be turned by different voices in different directions, a poem that might even be "directed" by the reader. I'd love to hear you read the poem again and, if you are willing, to discuss it a bit with me on camera for my upcoming Massive Open Online Course on American poetry.

To remind you, the course I'm working on is *Poetry in America*, one of three Humanities courses that will be launched internationally by edX in the next 18 months. This free course will allow students of all ages around the world to immerse themselves in the history, the art, and the interpretation of American poetry. Using state of the art tools, the course will combine text, video, audio, archival materials, on site historical narrative and interactive features, and it will have a companion book that docks with it. (I'm writing that book now.)

As I'm asking you here, I am inviting other distinguished Americans to do short cameo readings and, when they are willing, short discussions of the poem with me. Those who have already done tapings, or have agreed to participate, include Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, Harvard President Drew Faust, performer and activist Eve Ensler, journalist Michael Pollan, Tour de France champion Greg Lemond, professor and PBS personality Henry Lewis Gates, (my husband!) Larry Summers, Rabbi Moshe Waldoks, poet Martin Espada, playwright Tony Kushner, and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino. We are now reaching out to Bill Clinton, Matt Damon, Natalie Portman, and John McCain, among others, and feel confident that many will agree. I'm very much hoping that you will agree to join this distinguished group.

The poem I'm hoping you would read is one that we discussed, William Carlos Williams's iconic poem "This Is Just to Say." The poem is copied below. There are, naturally, commentaries on it I could share, if you wanted to read some, but you seem to have already thought about it quite a bit.

**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

Logistically, we are at your service. I would be happy to film you when I visit New York on October 24th. Or, I would love it if you would come visit Larry and me in Boston with Jeffrey. We could show you and Soon Yi around Harvard, eat a big bowl of plums, and talk poetry. I would introduce you on camera and you'd read, or recite, and we'd perhaps talk about the poem for a moment.

Thank you very much for considering this proposal. I admire you immensely and would feel honored to bring you into this project.

Best,  
Lisa New