

Story #402 (Tape #4, 1972)

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How Namık Kemal Passed His Examination

According to what I heard some time ago, Namık Kemal¹ was sent abroad to study. There were many like him from other lands who were studying in the same place.

Finally the time came for them to take their examinations². When each student entered the room, one of the examiners farted and said to the student, "Take this to the Post Office and mail it."

As each student came out of the examination room, all those awaiting their turns inquired eagerly, "What questions did they ask you?"

¹ Namık Kemal (1840-1888) was probably the greatest Turkish poet of the last half of the 19th century. Part of the "Tanzimat School" of writers, he was among the "Young Ottomans" who, realizing how far Turkey was falling behind European nations, began the first serious revolutionary movement among the intelligentsia. His journalistic work very soon brought him into disfavor with the Sultan, and to avoid arrest he fled to Europe, where he published (in England and then Switzerland) an underground newspaper which was smuggled into Turkey. Today he is greatly respected as a patriot and as a poet. The peasants have a vague knowledge of his genius and courage which they eulogize by making Namık Kemal the protagonist of witty, often earthy anecdotes in which he always bests some representative of the Establishment with his verbal skill.

² In Turkish universities there is more emphasis on oral examinations than in many universities in other lands. For undergraduate courses there may be a written examination, but there is almost certainly an oral examination.

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"None. They just told me a joke," each student said.

When Namik Kemal entered the examination room, he was given the same treatment. One of the teachers farted and told Namik Kemal, "Take this to the Post Office and mail it."

When he came out into the corridor again, all the other students asked Namik Kemal, "What did they say? What did they ask you?"

Namik Kemal said nothing, but two minutes later he reentered the examination room. After greeting the examiners respectfully, he said, "Sir, I am returning your letter, for the Post Office was closed." He then farted and left the room, and thus he passed his examination.