



## What had malaria wrought me

As burning fevers, agues pale and faint,  
 Life-poisoning pestilence and frenzies wood,  
 The marrow-eating sickness, whose attaint  
 Disorder breeds by heating of the blood;  
 Surfeits, imposthumes, grief, and damn'd despair,  
 Swear nature's death for framing thee so fair.

~ William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* Lines 739–744

Shakespeare, yes, a close relation of mine, being of member of the same family Hominidae. For that matter you are too. I find it quite amusing that when some writers mention someone of the same surname to theirs, but not directly related in a family tree, as 'no relation'. Biologically speaking we are all closely related (99.99% genetic similarity). Chimpanzees are our first cousins, and bacteria a bit distant. Calling someone 'no relation' is a bit harsh and somewhat a denial of the universal tree of life.

I reckon Shakespeare was most certainly wailing about malaria in the mentioned poem, and that the disease was rampant in his time. Malaria has been cruel with perfect indifference in the history of humankind.

I developed quite an early affair with malaria. For the simple reason that I contracted it during my primary school days. The intermittent and recurrent fever would maul me up to my middle school life. I suffered the misfortune of a series of misdiagnosis and improper medication. Interestingly I had the experience of one of the most disgusting medications that consisted of eating a live beg bug (*Cimex lectularius*, but we did not call it that). It was like a hot dog with bed bug filling and banana as the sandwich. Thanks to the selfless sacrifice (considering their lack of complex central nervous system necessary for self-conception) of those anonymous bugs that I survive.

It was during those recluse moments that I became engorged in comic books. We had quite a collection of all sorts. I can vividly recall (but as to the specific book I cannot ascertain, but I would readily bet on Indrajal Comics, either *The Phantom* or *Mandrake*) a fact information page which bore a caricature of Sir Ronald Ross. He was in a military outfit with a topee, a mosquito net in his hands and swatting with it, with a fitting remark, "Here's the culprit." I liked the story of Ross ever since.

My next brush with malaria came in an unlikely situation during reign of the so-called grunge metal. The main engine of the music genre Nirvana rose to fame with a hit single 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' which I extremely liked. But I could never comprehend why disease and mosquito were invoked in Kurt Cobains lyrics, but then I realized he often used nonsensical lines. The chorus goes:

With the lights out, it's less dangerous  
 Here we are now, entertain us  
 I feel stupid and contagious  
 Here we are now, entertain us

A mulatto, an albino  
 A mosquito, my libido

Yeah

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