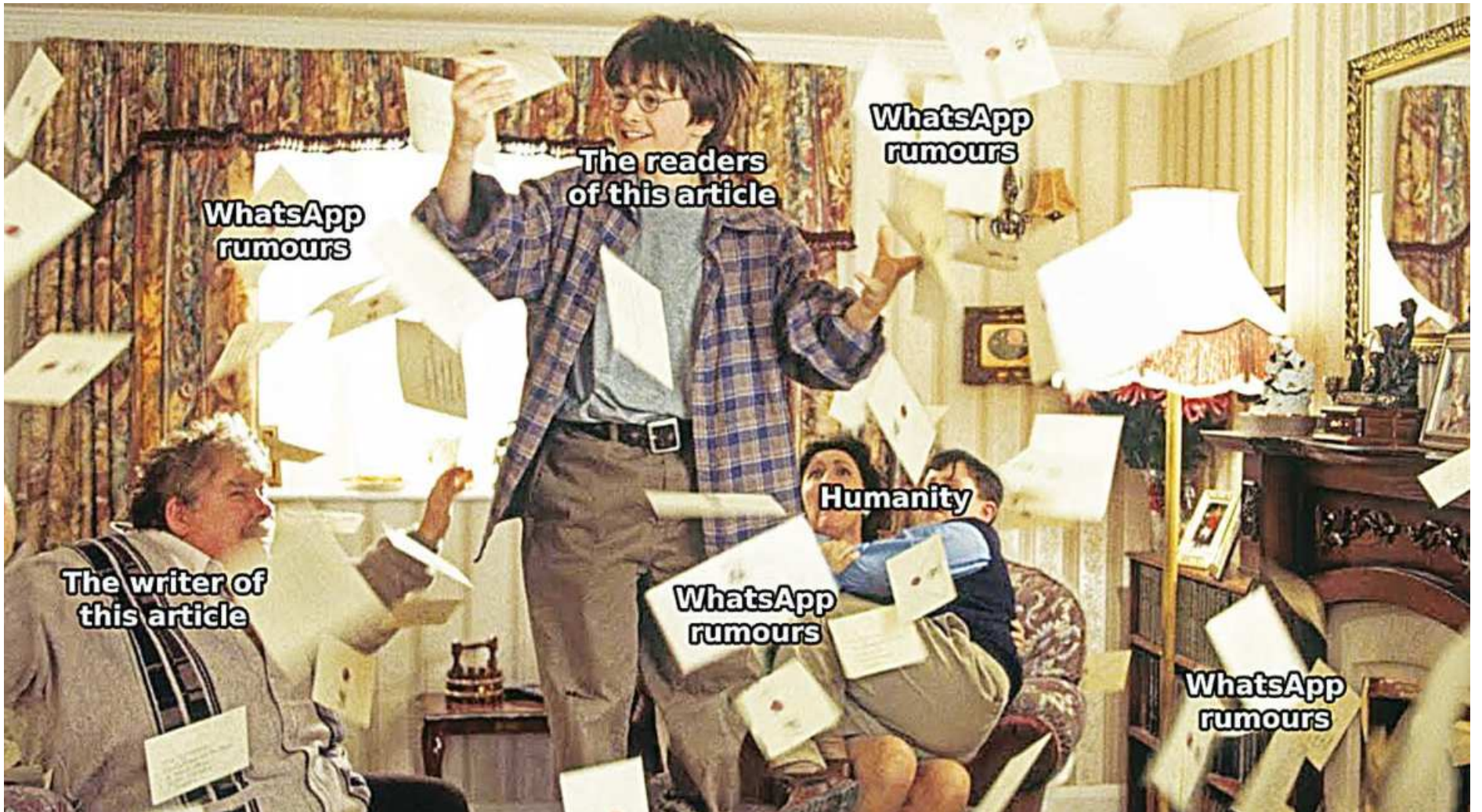


# THE TERROR ON APP STREET



## ROSHNI SHAMIM

I don't know if it is too late to tell anyone about this. Perhaps I am already doomed and there is not much left to do... But I must stop the others, I must stop *you* from falling in this trap and putting yourself in danger just like I inevitably have without realising.

It all began six months ago when I moved to this new area. Initially, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the neighbourhood was full of friendly faces and warm demeanours. Having lived as a recluse for years, it was a nice change to see how helpful and sweet my neighbours seemed. In the early days, all was going great until I met... her. Now, if you decide to continue reading this further, then you must remember from here on there is no turning back; you must finish reading this story until the very end if you want to save yourself, as well as your loved ones. You see, this spine-chilling tale is about my eerie neighbour, known as WhatsApp Aunty.

That should have really been my first indication about something being wrong here. For starters, nobody in the area knows WhatsApp Aunty's real name. She apparently earned this nickname initially as a joke; every time she would meet any of the neighbours, her style of greeting consisted of only two words: "What's up?"

At first, people didn't actually take her question seriously. However, her beady eyes and anticipative smile soon destroyed that illusion and gave way to people's realisation that she was indeed, very serious

about knowing *what's up*. I remember my first meeting with her as if it had happened just yesterday. I had opened the door in response to my ringing doorbell to be met by this sweet – or so I had thought at the time – Aunty standing there with a bright smile, her hands delicately holding a covered box which I naturally assumed was food of some sort.

"What's up?!" Those had been her exact first words as soon as she had laid her eyes on me. At the time, I had brushed it aside with a cursory "Oh, all well, all fine" waving my hands offhandedly in response. Her smile had faltered slightly hearing my words but she had hastily fixed her bright smile back in place soon enough.

"Not to worry, dear!" she had said then, "Soon we shall fix that too." I was confused about what she had meant by that but yet again, I had chosen to ignore it as an irrelevant eccentricity of this otherwise friendly neighbour. "This is a little housewarming gift for you!" WhatsApp Aunty had said at the time, placing the covered box in my hands. I remembered being surprised at how light the box was, figuring perhaps there were cookies inside or some basic lightweight food. "Thank you so much! Also I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name?" As soon as the words had left my mouth, WhatsApp Aunty had given a small chuckle and hastily walked away.

The real horror began though after she had left and I finally uncovered the box. Inside were these little sticky pads organised in categories that went: *MISINFORMATION*, *TEA*, *WISHES*, *HACKS*. Confused, I

had delicately picked the first pad labelled *MISINFORMATION* and began to skim through the pages. It was a thoroughly startling wad of information indeed or more like, *false* information. There were tips on guaranteed immunity against Covid-19 with garlic and lemon, how sleeping at a 45 degree angle with your right leg bent could cure osteoporosis, the benefits of chewing raw onion at 2 AM every morning for attaining rosy, glowing skin-oh and most ironically, understanding that phones were the number one reason for every failure in your life.

I wish it stopped there but the other bundles turned out to be just as scary. *TEA* consisted of every kind of brown family gossip to ever exist. Someone in the family was too fat for marriage while another was borderline anorexic and surely, dosing on some substance. *SATs* were the new judgement criteria and scores were being exchanged like laddoos on Eid. The *WISHES* category was really just ten-page letters going on and on about how much your presence means to the sender in question, life being a swing of ups and downs and if you love them back, you had better be reending this wish to ten other people! Perhaps the worst had turned out to be the *HACKS* category, which was really more to do with upgrading your life decisions so as to avoid a hacker who could potentially disrupt and take over all your data.

The box had left me so shaken that I had to sit down immediately after just to process all that I had just read. Was this some sort of joke? Surely, this woman

did not go around the neighbourhood welcoming new residents with so much misinformation in a box?! After endless days spent on trying to deduce this mystery, I had finally taken a step back from it and concluded that it was probably just some gag, a joke by Aunty. I was proven wrong soon enough when a new resident showed up a few months later and behold! There she was again. Standing at my new neighbour's porch with an eerily similar covered box, talking oh-so-warmly with the new, unaware resident. It hit me then that this was no joke and that WhatsApp Aunty was truly the underground terror that we all had to be careful from. I am happy to inform you that so far I have safely kept away from all links that could potentially lead back to her, and all has been good. Until now.

You see, rumor has it that WhatsApp Aunty's friend has just moved in. Nobody speaks about it yet the silent looks say enough. This time before things get out of hand again, I am writing all this down for you, dear reader, to be wary and make sure to mark yourself safe from a different kind of pandemic that may soon take over.

All you need to know now to keep yourself safe is that the new terror's name is TikTok.

Destroy this letter as soon as you have reached this line.

*Post writing this article, Roshni was soon held captive by WhatsApp Aunty and her other buddies. Send her your escape routes from the internet at roshni.shamim@gmail.com*