

## So that we know

Warning: All below is fiction and for your entertainment. None of the characters are real.

The Last Light in \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

-your town name here-

Once upon a time, on a Friday night in \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ , you could hear the bass of a teenage disco thudding through the fog. Lights danced from the windows of the old parish hall, and kids queued in their trendiest clothes, giddy and unsure. Parents waited in cars. Doormen nodded. There were the awkward glances, the flirtations, the fights, the laughter, the songs people still remember. It was raw and imperfect—but real.

Now, the same building stands silent. The windows are dark. The plaster is flaking. And on the lamppost outside, a laminated sign flutters:

"Event cancelled due to insurance constraints. No further bookings."

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Mr. Brendan Quigley, the Chair of the Local Planning Authority, wasn't a cruel man. He was just risk averse.

"We must uphold standards," he'd say at council meetings. "Fire exits, crowd control, acoustic containment, soundproofing. Liability!" He often quoted case law. "Better to avoid litigation than fund recovery."

Eithne Hall, regional manager of Real Mutual Insurance, was crisp and immaculate. "Youth events are a liability sinkhole," she said plainly. "Claims from sprains, drunken injuries, even psychological trauma. Our risk profile doesn't support cover under €38,000 per annum. And that's for limited access."

Sergeant Neil Doran, of the town's Gardaí, rarely patrolled at night anymore.

"We haven't the staff, too much desk work nowadays. Garda Vetting and motoring issues takes up so much time and resources", he said. "Anyway, let them stay home. Less trouble that way." He says he doesn't like confrontation. When a youth vandalised a chip shop window last month, Neil had sighed. "If we prosecute him, his Mam'll raise hell. What's the use?"

Mary Hanlon, now in her forties, used to DJ the youth nights.

“People talk about sports clubs,” she’d tell you, “but sport isn’t for everyone. It doesn’t teach you how to flirt, or be awkward, or navigate chaos. That was the disco. I met my first boyfriend at Club Alchemy. We danced to Dexie’s Midnight Runners.” Her eyes sparkled. “There was magic in that sweaty chaos.”

She now volunteers at the EU funded youth centre—though there’s little to do. Ping pong. A film or music lessons. Occasionally, a poetry night.

John Doe is sixteen. Last month, he set fire to a bin outside the Euro-Base shop.

“I don’t know why,” he admitted in court. “Just felt mad. We were bored.”

He and his mates wander the carpark in the evenings. Sometimes they vape. Sometimes they film make-believe fights and upload them to TikTok. He doesn’t play GAA. He used to sneak into “Over-18s” events—before the clubs stopped or made entry 21+

“We’ve nowhere now. No craic. Just the phone.”

The town has become quiet—but not peaceful. Just quiet.

Fewer Garda callouts, yes. But more quiet addictions, more late-night mental health crises, more isolation, and a deep cultural flattening. The children of the town were growing up in digital silence. Risk-averse policies had neutered all spontaneity.

Teenagers, who once found freedom under disco balls, now found it in fake personas, online cliques, and anonymous cruelty.

Patrick “Patch” Cullen, a local shopkeeper and former councillor, had enough.

He’d saved for years and converted a shed beside his shop. He had contractors install toilets, lit the extensions with LEDs, installed fire exits and the painted he did himself.

He called it “The Hanger.” But he couldn’t open it.

“Red tape,” he said.

He held up a folder of insurance quotes, planning refusals, more fire cert requirements, public indemnity hurdles.

“They’re afraid of joy. Afraid someone might fall over, sue, and dance while doing it.”

At a town hall meeting—poorly attended—Patch stood up.

“We’ve created a town where it’s easier to insure a cemetery than a dance floor. That’s not \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ , . That’s cowardice disguised as order.”

He offered a plan:

Private venues under capped indemnity policies.

An insurance co-op model to reduce premium load.

Temporary “low-barrier” event licenses for youth-run nights with adult supervision.

A Garda liaison post for each event—not to prosecute, but to attend and integrate.

He ended with a quiet line:

“Let kids be kids. Before all they know is screens and supervision.”

At first, nothing changed. Brendan Quigley frowned. Eithne raised eyebrows. Neil shrugged.

But Mary Hanlon backed him. So did five parents with teenagers. And three Gardaí, new recruits who were young but remember hearing what freedom tasted like.

The Hanger opened under a pilot scheme. One Friday night, the lights blinked again through the fog. And for the first time in years, the town breathed.

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Dream on: The Hanger never actually opened. Most of the young people moved away, many died or developed issues.

And those that did comeback.... what are they doing?