

11. Ludlow Massacre (1914)

Rocky and Louis are sitting in a car outside of a fast food restaurant, waiting for their friend, Louis, to get out of work. Louis comes out to the car, slamming the door as he gets in.

Louis: I can't believe this! They're making me work an extra shift this weekend!

Rocky: *(sarcastic)* Sounds terrible. They're paying you to work more.

Louis: It's not so much the working that I mind, it's the lack of respect, you know? I should get a union started in this place.

Rocky: Well, at least you don't have to work for John Rockefeller and live in a company town.

Louis: Rockefeller, yeah, that guy must have just been a real prince to work for. He'd probably go all Ludlow on me.

Debby: *(leaning forward from the back seat)* What on earth are you guys talking about? Ludlow? Company towns? What kind of reference is that? I get Rockefeller; he was a billionaire that treated his employees like dirt.

Rocky: Ludlow was a coal mining town in Colorado in the early nineteen hundreds. One of the companies that mined there was owned by Rockefeller.

Louis: And in many of the mines, the miners were paid for how much coal they brought out, but they weren't paid if they did things to make the mine safer, like putting up supports.

Debby: What?! That's insane! That would be like paying you for how many burgers you flip and then not caring about the grease burns you get. *(smiling)*

Louis: Ha ha, very funny. The point is that the miners in Colorado tried to join a miner's union because they knew that union mines had proven to be safer across the country.

Rocky: To try to break the union, the company started to hire immigrant workers that spoke different languages so that it would be harder to get together and form groups.

Louis: Eventually, the union was successful and the miners went on strike.

Debby: So I'm guessing that if they went on strike then they were kicked out of the company town?

Rocky: Exactly.

Debby: What's a company town?

Louis: It was a town that companies set up to house their workers and supply them with everything they needed.

Debby: Sounds kind of nice, actually. Not having to worry about anything after work.

Rocky: Except that they took away your freedom. Often times, you couldn't leave the town, and non-workers couldn't enter. You had to buy the company brands, no name brand things there. And if you talked bad about the company. *(shaking his head)* Look out.

Debby: Dang. So what happened to the workers that were striking and kicked out of the company town?

Louis: The evicted workers set up a camp outside the town on public land. And it was real messy there between the strikers and the company.

Rocky: Sometimes, the striking workers would sabotage some equipment or the mine.

Louis: So the mining companies set up protection by forming militias or armed guard troops. There were some small fights between the strikers and militias.

Louis: Then, one morning all heck broke loose. One of the militia leaders went down into the striker camp in Ludlow, looking for one of the strike leaders. As he approached the camp, his militia set up machine guns on the hills surrounding the camp.

Debby: What?! That sounds like a kind of drastic step! Did the strikers do something to protect themselves?

Rocky: Yeah, they grabbed their guns and found positions that seemed good to protect themselves.

Louis: Then somebody fired; we're still not sure who, but the militia unleashed their machine guns. The battle went on most of the day.

Rocky: While the strikers had more people, the militia had better weapons, with the machine guns, as well as better firing spots from the hills around the camp.

Debby: *(disgusted)* Ugh.

Louis: And once the strikers fled the camp to run to the hills, the militia went down and burned the camp.

Rocky: But what they didn't know, or maybe they did, was that the strikers had dug foxholes, almost tiny little basements, under their tents to hide from bullets that would sometimes shoot through the tents.

Debby: And people were still hiding in those foxholes when they burned them?

Louis: Yep. Mostly women and children. About twenty people died that day and they called it the Ludlow Massacre.

Debby: Hey! I've heard that song, by that folk singer, Woody Guthrie.

Rocky: Yeah, now you know what he was writing about.

Debby: So what happened to the strike?

Louis: Well, the leader of the militia was never punished for the killings and the strikers were blacklisted from working in mines. But, eventually, laws were passed to protect mine workers.

Debby: Jeez.

Louis: Yeah, I guess my job maybe isn't that bad after all. But if they want one more extra shift...!