

9. The Jungle (1906)

Frankie and Nathan are sitting at a lunch table with their lunch trays in front of them. Today's main course was a hot dog.

Joey: Ugh, I can't eat this. *(throwing hot dog down on plate after taking only one bite)* This is disgusting. I'm becoming a vegetarian.

Nathan: Let me ask you this, did you find a finger in your hot dog?

Joey: Ewww!!! Oh my gosh! No, I didn't find a finger in it!

Nathan: Well, then, consider yourself lucky.

Joey: Lucky? How am I lucky? I was just served a bunch of questionable ground up turkey and beef parts boiled into a tube.

Nathan: One Mr. Upton Sinclair would consider that hot dog more of a tube steak and a delicacy compared to what he was used to.

Joey: This thing? *(waving the limp hot dog around)* A delicacy?

Nathan: Yeah, back at the beginning of the twentieth century you'd never know what to expect in one of those things. Could have been a human finger, maybe some rat droppings, you just never knew.

Joey: What?! Who was this Upton Sinclair guy and why was he getting hot dogs with human fingers in them?

Nathan: Have you seen any of those food movies recently where it talks about how horrible our food is to eat these days because of the way they feed the animals and force them to live in confined spaces?

Joey: Yeah, I've seen those. Those farms that sell beef and chicken to big fast food restaurants and stuff basically just fatten up animals as fast as they can, then they slaughter them in huge slaughter houses with no regard for the animal's health.

Nathan: Exactly. Well, those are our problems today, but back then it wasn't about how the factories treated the live animals, it was about what they turned the animals into.

Joey: So this Upton Sinclair guy was the filmmaker back then that exposed the horrible things that went into sausage?

Nathan: Yes and no. They didn't have movies back then, so he wrote books. His most famous book was when he investigated and explored the sausage factories. It was a fiction novel based on an immigrant's experiences, called *The Jungle*.

Joey: Yeah, I've kind of figured that out from what you said. So human fingers, rat droppings, what else?

Nathan: Not even just human fingers. In some rare cases an entire person might fall into a vat and be ground up. But, if you've got rat droppings, what else do you have problems with?

Joey: Rats, ugh. (*shivering*)

Nathan: Yep. The rats crawled all over the meat, leaving their droppings and whatever else they did on top of the meat. All of it went right into the mixer for the sausage.

Joey: And if you've got rats that means you've probably got rat poison?

Nathan: Dang straight. They just dumped the rat poison right on top of the meat, then when they needed it, plop (*tilts his hand*) right into the meat grinder.

Joey: Ahhhh! (*shivering again*) This is horrible! They didn't even rinse it off!

Nathan: If people got lucky the meat may have been rinsed off by rain water that leaked in through the roof. But if there was meat on the floor they just swept it up, sawdust, nails, dismembered body parts, and all, plop (*tilts hand again*) Right into the meat grinder.

Joey: And people kept buying this stuff?! Why on earth would people buy this?

Nathan: People were poor. They had to take chances on this meat or starve. What would you do? Plus, aside from the workers, people didn't know about it.

Joey: At this point I'm not so sure which I'd choose. Didn't people get sick?

Nathan: Absolutely. The Spanish-American War was going on at the time, and one meat company made canned meat for the army. Their cans of meat had actually expired, so they took them back, re-labeled them with a different expiration date, and sent them back to the army. Then, when the cans got shipped to a warmer climate they started to explode from the gases of the rotten meat inside. You may want to check on this fact, but I've heard that more people died in that war from food poisoning than from battle.

Joey: Eck. I can't believe this. Did anything good come out of this?

Nathan: Thankfully, yes. What would eventually become the Food and Drug Administration of the government was created. It's their job to inspect factories and food products to make sure they are healthy and safe to eat.

Joey: (*shaking the limp hot dog again*) So even though it's gross, it's still safe to eat?

Nathan: Still safe to eat, one or sixty eight.

Joey: I think I'll still stick to becoming a vegetarian. (*drops hot dog down on plate*)