



The biography of a courageous twentieth-century union organizer

The Girl Who Dared to Defy

Jane Street and the Rebel Maids of Denver

By Jane Little Botkin

In the wake of the violent labor disputes in Colorado's two-year Coalfield War, a young woman and single mother resolved in 1916 to change the status quo for "girls," as well-to-do women in Denver referred to their hired help. Her name was Jane Street, and this compelling biography is the first to chronicle her defiant efforts—and devastating misfortunes—as a leader of the so-called housemaid rebellion.

A native of Indiana, Jane Street (1887–1966) began her activist endeavors as an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In riveting detail, author Jane Little Botkin recounts Street's attempts to orchestrate a domestic mutiny against Denver's elitist Capitol Hill women, including wives of the state's national guard officers and Colorado Fuel and Iron operators. It did not take long for the housemaid rebellion to make local and national news.

Despite the IWW's initial support of the housemaids' fight for fairness and better pay, Street soon found herself engaged in a gender war, the target of sexism within the very organization she worked so hard to support. The abuses she suffered ranged from sabotage and betrayal to arrests and abandonment. After the United States entered World War I and the first Red Scare arose, Street's battle to balance motherhood and labor organizing began to take its toll. Legal troubles, broken relationships, and poverty threatened her very existence.

In previous western labor and women's studies accounts, Jane Street has figured only marginally, credited in passing as the founder of a housemaids' union. To unearth the rich detail of her story, Botkin has combed through case histories, family archives, and—perhaps most significant—Street's own writings, which express her greatest joys, her deepest sorrows, and her unfortunate dealings with systematic injustice. Setting Jane's story within the wider context of early-twentieth-century class struggles and the women's suffrage movement, *The Girl Who Dared to Defy* paints a fascinating—and ultimately heartbreaking—portrait of one woman's courageous fight for equality.

Jane Little Botkin turned to historical investigation and writing upon retiring as a teacher. She is the author of *Frank Little and the IWW: The Blood That Stained an American Family*, which won five awards, including two Spur Awards from the Western Writers of America and the Caroline Bancroft History Prize.

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