

## **GRANDMOTHER DANCED WITH THOMAS EDISON**

*In memory of Maude Lewis Walsh*

Grandma would sit in her old bentwood rocker  
with its woven cane back and seat  
in the tidy little parlor of the bungalow Dad built for her  
She'd go on and on for hours about days gone by

One of the people she went on about  
was "the wizard of Menlo Park,"  
Thomas Alva Edison

I don't think she liked him much  
That's likely because her brother, James  
(who she called, Sonny)  
was employed by the inventor  
at one of Edison's New Jersey labs  
and according to Grandma, Edison took credit  
for everything her brother invented

She said Sonny invented a part  
that went into the automobile  
and something else that was  
a kind of closure for a high-button shoe  
She wasn't very specific  
and I was too young then  
to ask the questions  
that would pop into my head  
long after Grandma died

Apparently James was hired under the same  
arrangement as William Dickson  
who worked on the motion picture camera project  
with Edison for five years, but  
didn't receive a whit of credit—  
Edison took all  
No wonder he accrued 1,368 patents in his lifetime!

I was amused when she told me  
with a grin on her lips and a glint in her eye  
that she danced with him once  
I don't know if it was a waltz or a fox trot  
or some other dance of the times  
don't know if it was before  
he married Mary Stilwell  
or after Mary died, during the two years  
before he married Mina Miller

I suppose it was before Grandma married Grandpa

and I have no way of knowing if they danced in the glow  
of one of his incandescent lamps  
or to music played on his favorite invention, the phonograph

Pretty and demure, the epitome of lace curtain Irish gentility  
Grandma never in any way suggested  
that she may possibly have stepped on the inventor's toe  
with her fashionable high-button shoe  
for the sake of her brother, but

whether she did or didn't, oh! how I wish  
someone had picked up the motion picture camera  
that rightly or wrongly, Edison was credited with inventing  
and recorded their glide across the dance floor  
for all of her descendants to see  
decades and decades hence

Maude Carolan Pych