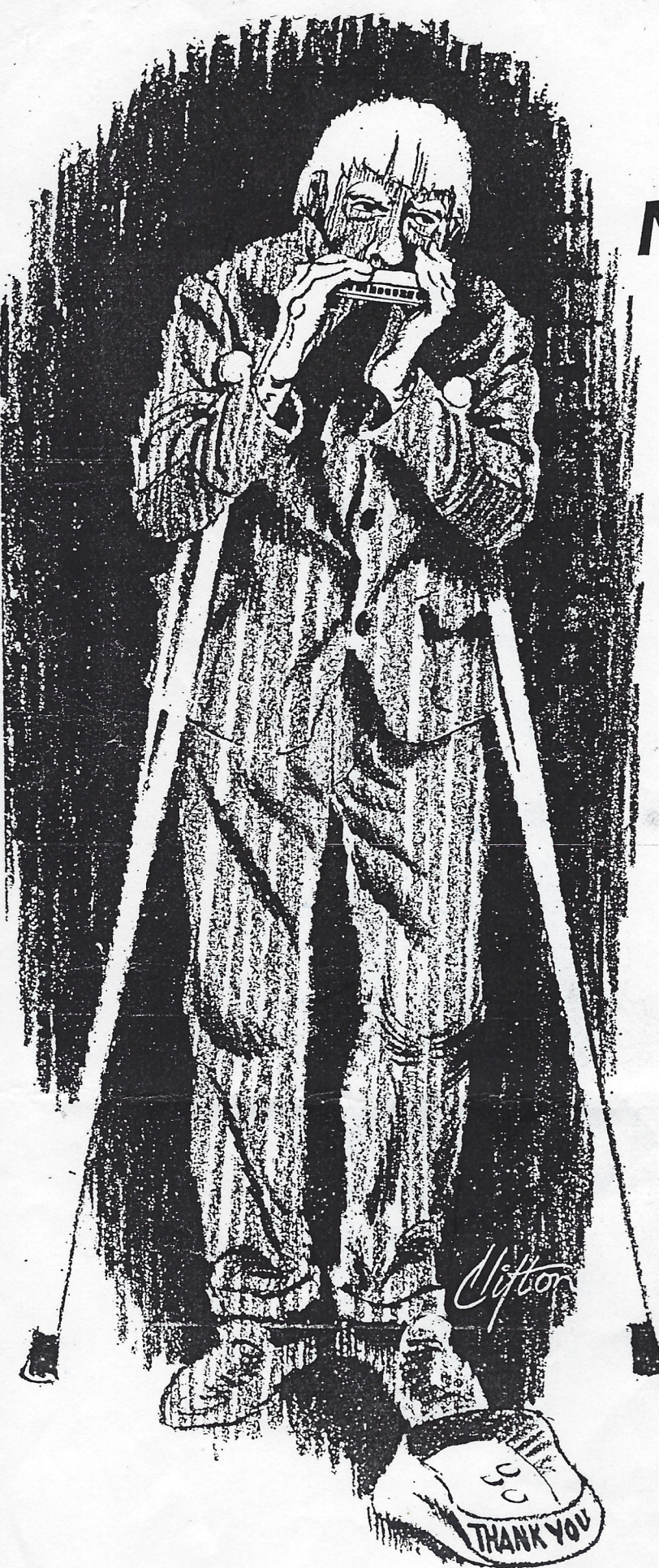


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1963



MR. O'SEA AND ME

I was young and lonely
and hadn't much money.
What could I do
for someone like him?

by **Maureen Blake**

*Winner of Honorable Mention award in the
Observer's Non-Fiction Writers' Contest.*

IT WAS a typical British winter's night, bitterly cold with a sharp, cutting wind which soon made me pull my collar up tight around my ears as I huddled close to the queue for warmth. It was New Year's Eve, I was away from home and alone, and—feeling very sorry for myself—I decided to pass the time at a movie.

As I stood waiting, I gradually became aware of a garbled sound rising above the shuffle and mumble of the crowd. I turned my head a little to one side and saw the old man, supported precariously by two crutches, leaning in the doorway of a store. His hair was white and roughly shorn, and the face beneath it would have looked gaunt save for the deep blue eyes, twinkling and bright, and the large bulbous nose which gave it a more friendly, robust look. My gaze shifted to his feet, clad only in a pair of worn-out house slippers, to the baggy pants, the threadbare coat with its patchy sleeves, and finally came to rest on his hands. Blue with cold and badly misshapen by arthritis, they clutched clumsily at the harmonica from which he was bravely trying to wring a sound resembling music. A battered cloth cap with the words "Thank You" printed on the inside of the peak and a few lonely pennies resting in it lay upturned on the street. I smiled wryly,