

'Twas a night after Christmas...

...precisely, the sixth.

And I was abed with my kin and my kith

And a belly well filled with goose, sprout and rum

And brandy-soaked yams fazing both head and tum.

When all of a sudden, up there on the roof,

Was such a commotion I near broke a tooth

(On a small nutted sweetmeat left o'er from the feast).

Wife sat up direct, crying: "Is there no peace?!"

'Twas only six nights past our sleep was disturbed

By that daft drunken elf and his stoned reindeer herd!

With his clear' made-up stories 'bout a Pole in the North!

Go see who it is! I bet it's that dwarf!"

So I rose from my covers, 'midst protest and grumble

(As I wiped from my nightshirt the remains of a crumble

I'd brought from the table when I turned for the night

Lest a hunger should take me wi't dark at its height),

And climbed up the stairs to the attic in question,

Stuck my head out the skylight – and at once indigestion

Beset and belayed me! 'Twas a sight that had caused it!

Up there, on the roof, a blue box with doors – it

Had writ on its lintels: "Police (public call)

Box", while a lamp flash-ed o'er it all.



In front stood... well, all I can call him is 'clown'
With a coat many coloured, girly hair and a frown.
"Well? What are you gawping at, man?" he demanded
In an accent that made me think Red Coats had landed.
And Red Coats not terribly happy at that –
His voice had the growl of a stood-upon cat.
But from inside the box came a tone much more pleasing.
A soft Yankee lilt: "Hey, Doctor, it's freezing!
Where are we? You told me we'd Christmas on Bondi!
I'm dressed for the beach! I'm bikini'd and thonged! I...!"
And out from the box came a girl – oh, the scandal!
What she wore... well, the most modest part was the sandal!
I shall not dwell more on the sight there before me.
That vision! That siren! That beauty! That houri!
Suffice it to say, that I swore on my life,
This part of the story I'd ne'er tell the wife!
"Peri, get back in the Tardis," quoth Clown.
"We're at the wrong house, the wrong place, the wrong town."
"And the wrong country?" she taunted with pleasure.
"No doubt the wrong century too, for good measure!"
But as he had bade, she re-entered the box.
And he followed her in... leaving loose all the locks!
The doors were ajar! So I took my chance:
Scrambled out of the skylight; cross tiles I advanced!



*I followed my quarry inside – soon I'd 'ave 'em! –
And found myself in, not a box, but a cavern!
'Twas bigger within than it had been without:
Had I not just met Santa, my sense I'd have doubt-
-Ed. But miracles now I was used to.
So this one, my credence, it just gave a boost to.
'Twas white of its walls, and unnat'rally bright,
And nowhere could I see a source of the light.
On every surface, a circle or roundel
(Although of their purpose no hint could be foundel),
And here was the Beauty, on a stool sat,
Beside, for some reason, a stand for a hat.
In the centre the Clown was stooped o'er a table
With sides numb'ring six, all lever and cable,
And central, a glass that did nothing but rise
And fall, with a noise like a grampus's sighs.
The Clown look-ed up. "What? Why are you here?!"
He snarled when he saw me. "No! Don't get too near!
The console's tuned finely! One wrong button pressed
Could cause dreadful damage. Just stay there – that's best!"
But all of a sudden, with a groan and a jolt,
The glass stopped its movement and shrieked to a halt.
The place started shaking – I was thrown 'cross the room,
Bounced off the 'console'...
and the whole world went 'fwoom'!*



When I came to my senses... not a thing was the same.

The walls and the console had all of them changed.

*The Clown, too, was gone, replaced by a man
Of somewhat less stature, with a flute in his hand,
And a dishevelled jacket – a hobo's appearance
(If you'll forgive me a word from eighty odd years hence).*

*The Beauty'd changed also; in her place, a girl that
Was short and was pretty, in a one-piece suit (cat).*

*And as for myself? I'd changed too, if you please,
For looking straight down... I could see both my knees!*

*I was wearing a skirt! No, the kilt of a Scot!
And my body was different: young; strong; and what
I had on my head, now cov'ring my dome,
Was wiry and thick! I had need of a comb!*

*(Not an emotion I'd felt for some years.
My heart, it was warm-ed – and so were my ears!)*
"Oh crumbs!" said the Hobo. "It's started to work! It

Must be what you sat on! The Chameleon Circuit!

It's not worked for ages! Now it's working with gustoo!

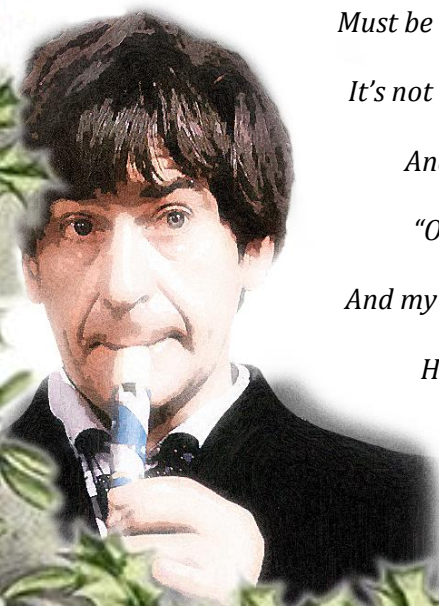
And not just the ship! It's also changed us, too!"

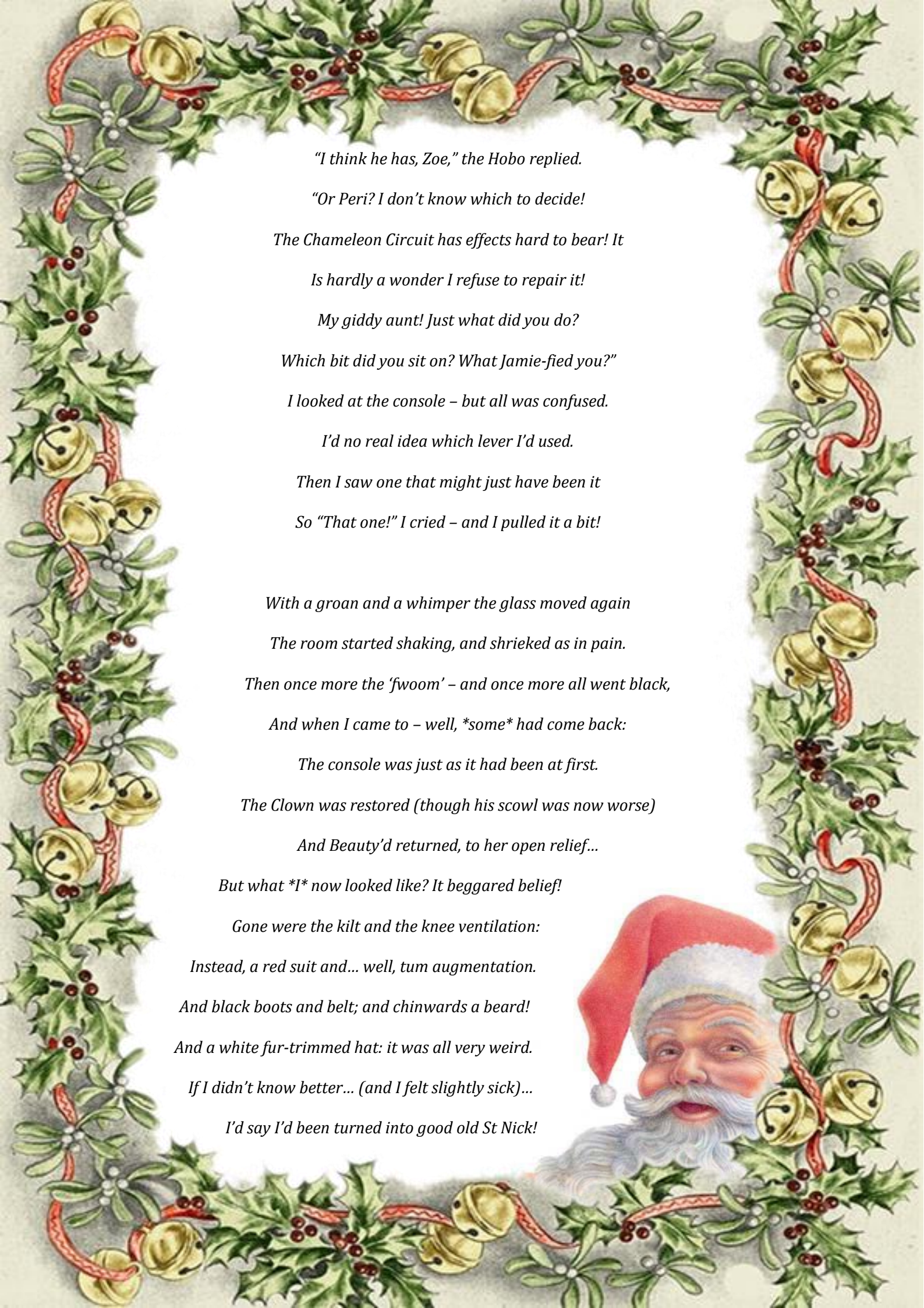
*"Oh, Doctor," cried Beauty, "I'm really minute!
And my hair is all weird – though the cat suit's quite cute!*

Has this person changed us, by placing his butt

On the console like that?

Just before it went 'phut'?"





"I think he has, Zoe," the Hobo replied.

"Or Peri? I don't know which to decide!

The Chameleon Circuit has effects hard to bear! It

Is hardly a wonder I refuse to repair it!

My giddy aunt! Just what did you do?

Which bit did you sit on? What Jamie-fied you?"

I looked at the console – but all was confused.

I'd no real idea which lever I'd used.

Then I saw one that might just have been it

So "That one!" I cried – and I pulled it a bit!

With a groan and a whimper the glass moved again

The room started shaking, and shrieked as in pain.

Then once more the 'fwoom' – and once more all went black,

*And when I came to – well, *some* had come back:*

The console was just as it had been at first.

The Clown was restored (though his scowl was now worse)

And Beauty'd returned, to her open relief...

*But what *I* now looked like? It beggared belief!*

Gone were the kilt and the knee ventilation:


Instead, a red suit and... well, tum augmentation.

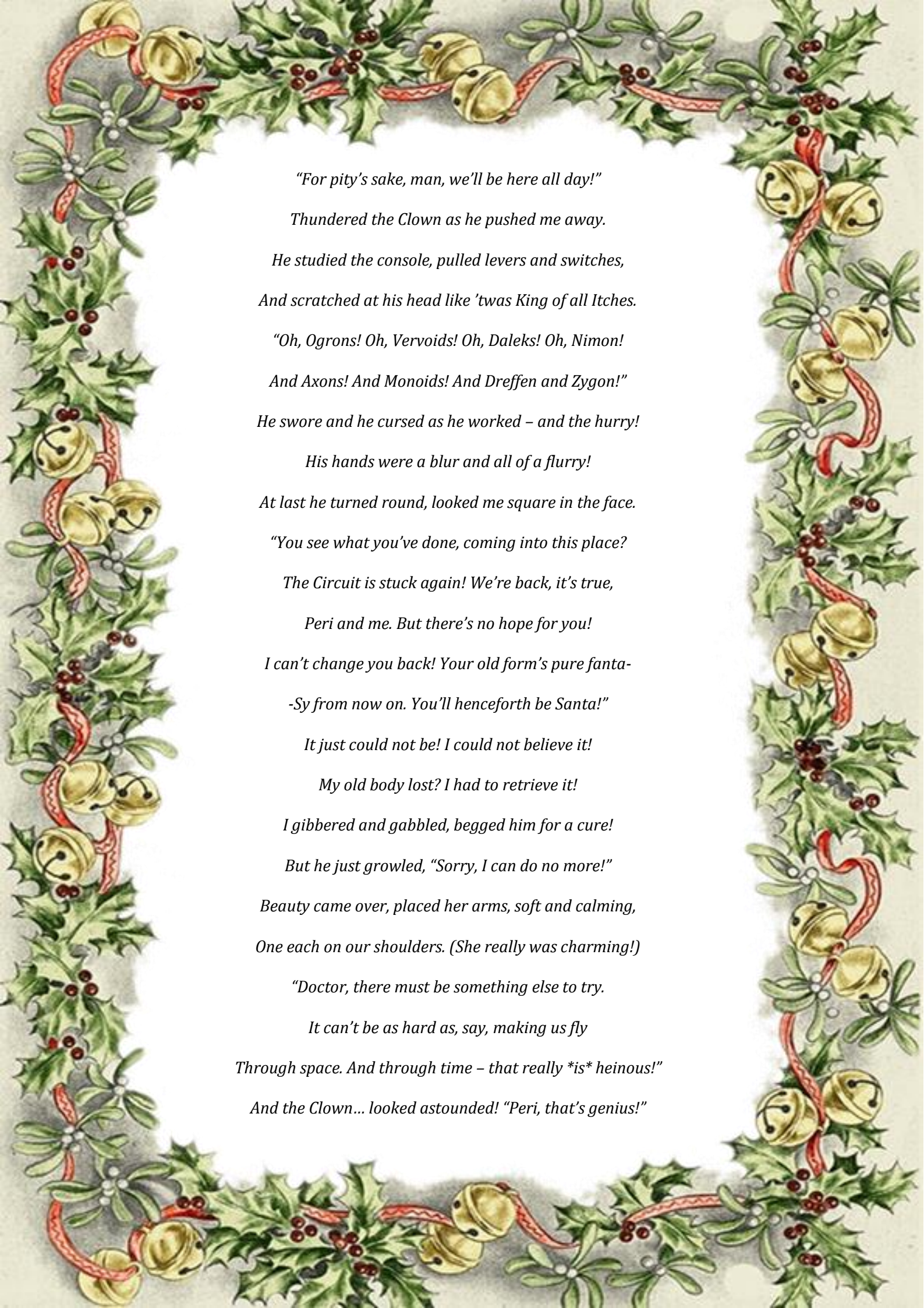
And black boots and belt; and chinwards a beard!

And a white fur-trimmed hat: it was all very weird.

If I didn't know better... (and I felt slightly sick)...

I'd say I'd been turned into good old St Nick!





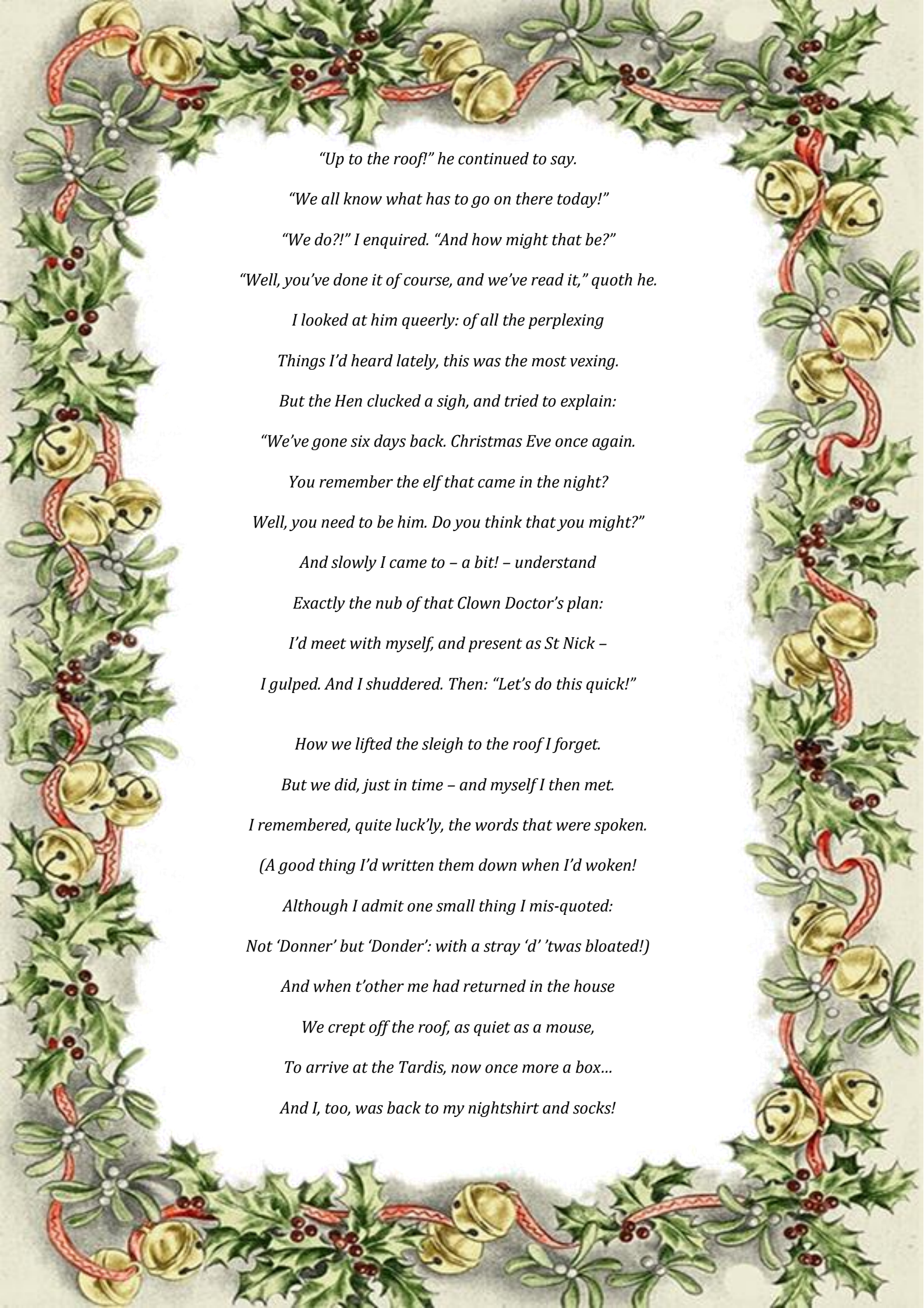
"For pity's sake, man, we'll be here all day!"
Thundered the Clown as he pushed me away.
He studied the console, pulled levers and switches,
And scratched at his head like 'twas King of all Itches.
"Oh, Ogrons! Oh, Vervoids! Oh, Daleks! Oh, Nimon!
And Axons! And Monoids! And Dreffen and Zygon!"
He swore and he cursed as he worked – and the hurry!
His hands were a blur and all of a flurry!
At last he turned round, looked me square in the face.
"You see what you've done, coming into this place?
The Circuit is stuck again! We're back, it's true,
Peri and me. But there's no hope for you!
I can't change you back! Your old form's pure fanta-
-Sy from now on. You'll henceforth be Santa!"
It just could not be! I could not believe it!
My old body lost? I had to retrieve it!
I gibbered and gabbled, begged him for a cure!
But he just growled, "Sorry, I can do no more!"
Beauty came over, placed her arms, soft and calming,
One each on our shoulders. (She really was charming!)
"Doctor, there must be something else to try.
It can't be as hard as, say, making us fly
*Through space. And through time – that really *is* heinous!"*
And the Clown... looked astounded! "Peri, that's genius!"

*"If I take us back to before Christmas Day
And kick this oaf out – it'll all go away!
The temporal stress won't be tolerated!
The Circuit's effects will be fully ablated!
Oh, it may well get worse before it gets better:
The Circuit may change things once more: in effect, a-
-Nother disguise for all of us three.
A final hurrah – let's try it and see!"*

*And he reached for the lever, and pulled on the knob,
And this time, 'twas less of a 'fwoom', more a... 'FWOB'!*

*Now, when I came to, I was there on the ground
Outside my house – and looking around
I saw that despite all the Clown's cryptic banter
I was still dressed in red, and looking like Santa.
But he and the Beauty were not to be seen,
And neither, of course, their infernal machine.
Instead, stood a sleigh piled high up with presents
With six small reindeer and a couple of pheasants.
It took me a while, but at last I surmised
That the sleigh was in fact the machine in disguise!
The Circuit had done its foul deed once again –
So the Clown and the Beauty? The Cock and the Hen!
And I let out a laugh at the sight there before me...
"Oh shut up!" squawked Cock.
"This is starting to bore me!"*





"Up to the roof!" he continued to say.

"We all know what has to go on there today!"

"We do?!" I enquired. "And how might that be?"

"Well, you've done it of course, and we've read it," quoth he.

*I looked at him queerly: of all the perplexing
Things I'd heard lately, this was the most vexing.*

But the Hen clucked a sigh, and tried to explain:

"We've gone six days back. Christmas Eve once again.

*You remember the elf that came in the night?
Well, you need to be him. Do you think that you might?"*

*And slowly I came to – a bit! – understand
Exactly the nub of that Clown Doctor's plan:
I'd meet with myself, and present as St Nick –
I gulped. And I shuddered. Then: "Let's do this quick!"*

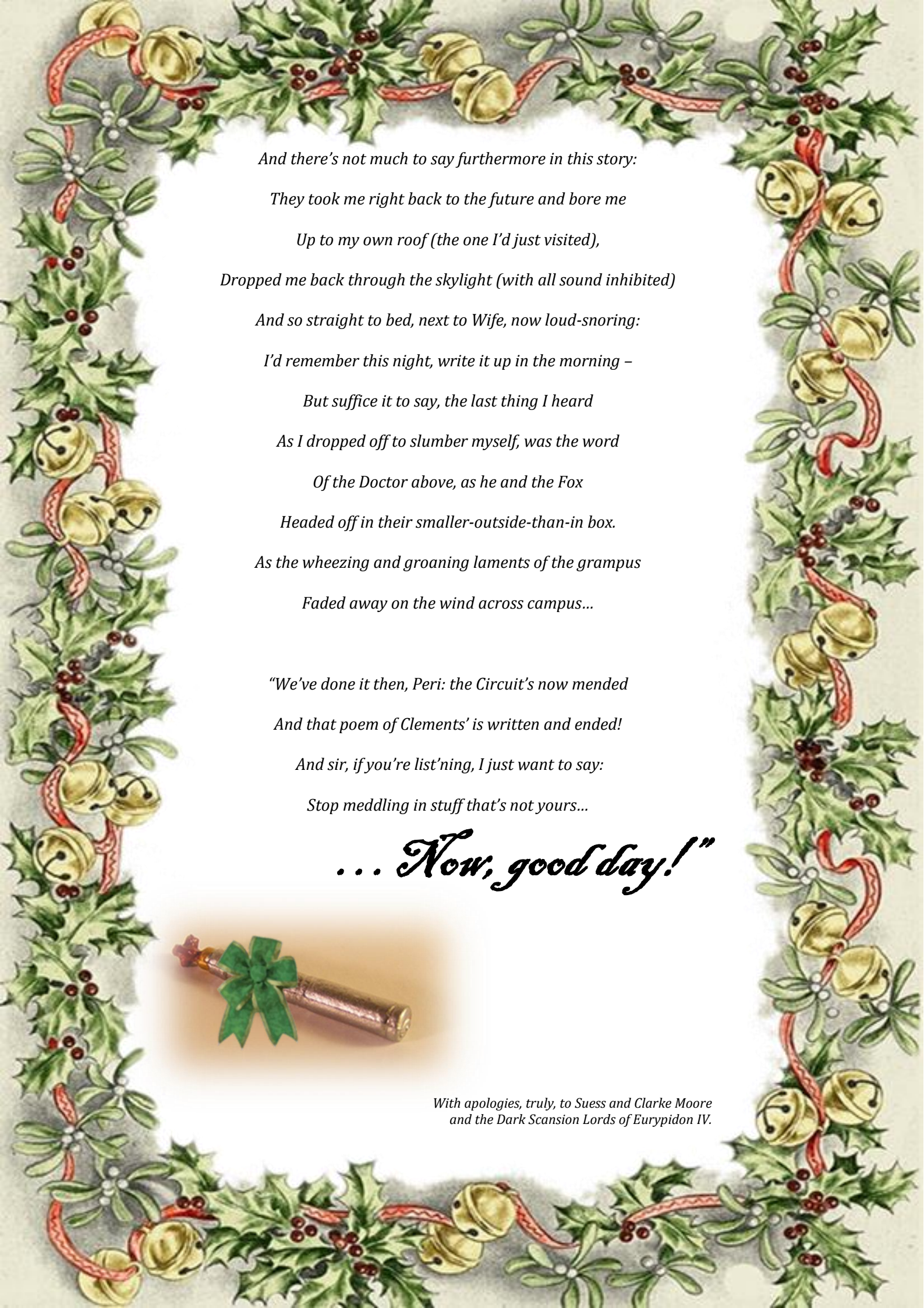
*How we lifted the sleigh to the roof I forget.
But we did, just in time – and myself I then met.
I remembered, quite luck'ly, the words that were spoken.
(A good thing I'd written them down when I'd woken!*

*Although I admit one small thing I mis-quoted:
Not 'Donner' but 'Donder': with a stray 'd' 'twas bloated!)*

And when t'other me had returned in the house

*We crept off the roof, as quiet as a mouse,
To arrive at the Tardis, now once more a box...*

And I, too, was back to my nightshirt and socks!



And there's not much to say furthermore in this story:

They took me right back to the future and bore me

Up to my own roof (the one I'd just visited),

Dropped me back through the skylight (with all sound inhibited)

And so straight to bed, next to Wife, now loud-snoring:

I'd remember this night, write it up in the morning –

But suffice it to say, the last thing I heard

As I dropped off to slumber myself, was the word

Of the Doctor above, as he and the Fox

Headed off in their smaller-outside-than-in box.

As the wheezing and groaning laments of the grampus

Faded away on the wind across campus...

"We've done it then, Peri: the Circuit's now mended

And that poem of Clements' is written and ended!

And sir, if you're list'ning, I just want to say:

Stop meddling in stuff that's not yours...

... Now, good day!"



*With apologies, truly, to Suess and Clarke Moore
and the Dark Scansion Lords of Eurypidon IV.*