

Once upon a time, far into the future, there was a gigantic cow. And when I say gigantic, I mean *gigantic*. Rumour had it she could wake up in London, roll out of bed and knock over the Eiffel Tower. One time, she had a craving for the tiniest little snack of tall grass and turned the entire Kansas prairie into a desert. The United States filed a lawsuit, but she fled the country at a gallop, gouging several new Grand Canyons on her way out.

It didn't take long for this cow, whose name was Penelope, to understand that she was alone. Everyone knows the countries of the world have a lot of trouble agreeing on anything important, but on this one issue, they were unanimous: the cow had to go.

How? Well, there was the nuclear approach, known as the Cow Kapow. Very destructive, not very practical. There was the ocean-dumping proposal – the Beef Reef – but there were fears it would raise sea levels and swamp coastal cities. Then, someone pointed out that Penelope could single-hoofedly solve world hunger, at least for a few days, in a plan referred to as The Biggest Hamburger In History. It was settled. A squadron of 500,000 highly-trained hunters set out in camouflage suits to take Penelope by surprise.

Now, Penelope was a cow of many talents, the most unexpected of which was concealment. She was absolutely covered in shrubs, trees and tangled ivy – like moss on sloths or barnacles on whales. Birds, snakes, squirrels, jaguars and even some species unknown to science nested there. Though none of them even knew of Penelope's existence, they were the closest thing to friends that she had. Maybe they would keep her safe.

But no. Even with her forest coat, Penelope was no match for the hunters. They tracked her to an enormous bamboo meadow. (Only bamboo grew fast enough to sustain a herbivore like Penelope, who chomped it down to grass height every day.)

Quickly, the hunters closed in. The Sun was nearly setting behind the distant mountains, which seemed like anthills to Penelope. The hunters themselves were even smaller than ants – more like gnats. She flicked her tail in a distracted, melancholic way and sent 400 of them soaring off to faraway continents. (Luckily, they were well-prepared with parachutes and dictionaries in many foreign languages.)

'Creature!' shouted Commander Jawslop, the sweaty officer in charge of the hunt. 'Surrender! You're outnumbered!'

The man's mosquito-whine didn't interest Penelope; nothing really did. She was a very sad and lonely cow.

The hunters readied their cannons.

'Wait!' cried a voice.

The hunters turned around in confusion.

A rusty, purplish, metallic object stood beside Commander Jawslop.

'Is that a *robot*?' someone blurted.

It was a tiny space robot by the name of Margaret. Did I mention the space robots? Like I said, this was all very far into the future. Space robots had been around for so long, they were practically outdated. Margaret lived on the Moon with a colony of much newer, swankier, snootier Moondroids, forced to mine precious metals and load them onto spaceships so rich people on Earth could sell them. Anyhow, word had reached the Moon about Penelope, and Margaret – who had a keen sense of justice – had stowed away on a cargo ship to Earth, then hitched a ride on one of the hunting trucks to meet her.

'You will not kill Penelope,' said Margaret, trembling so much her joints rattled like a cutlery drawer when a jet flies by. 'I will not allow it.'

'You're scrap metal that should've been melted down last century,' said Commander Jawslop. 'Get out of the way before I do it myself.'

'I'm not afraid of you,' Margaret squeaked. She barely came up to the commander's knee. 'Just try and stop me.'

With that, she produced a bag of jetberries.

Did I mention that spaceships were powered by berries? Well, a few decades earlier, some scientists tinkering with blueberry genes had accidentally discovered a sustainable, ultra-compact fuel source that looked like shiny rabbit poo. A single jetberry could kick a rocket straight to Mars – and fast.

'What on Earth-?' said Jawslop.

'I stole them from a warehouse on the Moon,' Margaret corrected. 'And they're going to set Penelope free.'

'Seize that bot!' Jawslop shouted.

A hunter snatched at Margaret and scooped her up – and the jetberries slipped to the ground, rolling away.

'No!' she cried.

But by this point, even Penelope – lost in her sad, lonely world – had begun to stir. She twisted around and saw what looked like gnats attacking a tiny midge. The poor thing! Penelope poked her snout at the bugs, knocking them awry. Amid the screams, Margaret fell from the hunter's grasp and scrambled toward the fallen jetberries. Frantically, she swept as many as she could back into the sack.

But it was too late.

'The net!' Jawslop bellowed. 'For the love of burgers, CAST THE NET!'

All at once, 100,000 cannons fired. Instead of ammunition, titanium fibres shot out and interlaced in midair. Down fell the net onto Penelope's back.

'Penelope!' Margaret shouted. Penelope started to writhe – trees and bushes on her back thrashed and toppled; birds wheeled away in terror – but the titanium was too strong. Hunters were bolting the ends of the net to the earth.

'Hang in there,' Margaret muttered. She jammed the jetberries into a tiny engine-like contraption she'd pulled from a pocket, then scrabbled up an ivy vine until she was right above Penelope's ear.

Margaret unfolded her built-in toolbox and clamped the engine to Penelope.

'Sorry, hope that didn't hurt!' Margaret cried. 'Now… BURP!'

Penelope blinked in fear and confusion. Did I mention that one of her talents was burping on command? Everyone knows cow farts emit methane gas, but it would've taken Margaret days to walk all the way to Penelope's nether end, so under the circumstances, a burp was the next best thing.

'Penelope, can you hear me? I said BURP, NOW!'

And Penelope, nearly fainting from terror, opened her mouth and let one rip.

Instantly, the methane was sucked into the jetberry engine.

'Blast off!' Margaret yelled.

With an earth-shaking explosion, Penelope the cow launched into space. The titanium fibres split like cut ribbons. Margaret hung on for dear life, one hand gripping the ivy, the other trying to keep her rattling head attached.

And as the wind blew back her ears, Penelope let out a wild, joyous, TREMENDOUS moo. Far below on Earth, skyscrapers trembled, avalanches tumbled and 10,000 blue whales surfaced singing to answer the call.

Cow and robot landed on the Moon just 8.7 seconds later. The ride hadn't been exactly pleasant, considering Penelope had nearly passed out from the G-forces and felt colder than an iceberg, but a brave cow like Penelope could survive almost anything for 8.7 seconds.

'You're safe now,' said Margaret, jumping down and leading her toward the synthetic bamboo generator Margaret had built just for her.

Completely overwhelmed, it took Penelope a minute to catch her breath. Yes – her breath. Did I mention that Margaret had run advanced calculations? She'd figured out that the jungle growing on Penelope's body would create an oxygen bubble, like an atmosphere around a small planet.

Finally, Penelope turned to Margaret and gave a soft moo. Its meaning was unmistakable: *You are my best friend* and *You saved my life* and *Why*? all rolled into one.

'Oh please,' said Margaret, with a purple robot blush. 'It's just, humans are so foolish. They're the real robots, if you ask me. The ones who only care about something if it's useful. Look what they were going to do to you – and look what they've done to us.'

That was when Penelope saw the colony of Moondroids: digging, wiping rust-sweat from their foreheads, clambering out of mineshafts coated in dust. Any that stumbled or slowed down hopped straight onto a conveyor belt to be melted.

Penelope let out a moo that was almost a growl.

And that was how the Great Space Robot Revolt began.

The End

Illustration: Kayla Jones