

Duo

By

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Duo

The Time: Now

The Place: The Demon's secret lair

Cast of Characters

ROCKMAN - A burly, chiseled superhero in his forties.

GRAVEL GIRL - Rockman's sidekick. An attractive 24-year-old superheroine, wearing a skimpy costume including high-heeled boots.

THE DEMON - A supervillain in his forties, sinister in a snively way.

Scene 1

(A windowless concrete basement. There is a door stage right. Center stage, ROCKMAN and GRAVEL GIRL are chained helplessly to a wall. Stage left, THE DEMON stands over a giant time bomb.)

DEMON

Finally, I have you both right where I want you! Today the world will suffer the end of Rockman and - um, what's your name again?

GRAVEL GIRL

I'm Gravel Girl!

DEMON

Well, alas, Gravel Girl, we hardly knew ye.

GRAVEL GIRL

We're not licked yet, Demon!

ROCKMAN

(to GRAVEL GIRL)

Please, sweetheart, let me do the talking. (to DEMON)
We're not licked yet, Demon!

DEMON

I beg to differ, Super-Minerals. (He hits a button on the bomb, which beeps loudly and begins to tick.) In ten minutes, this whole building will blow sky-high and take both of you with it.

GRAVEL GIRL

You're crazy!

ROCKMAN

(to GRAVEL GIRL) Hush! (To DEMON) You're crazy! You'll never get away with this, you scoundrel.

DEMON

On the contrary, I believe I already have. (Gestures to bomb.) Now if you'll excuse me, I have a hydrofoil to catch. See you on the other side, Rockhead and Rabble Girl!

(DEMON laughs maniacally and exits. ROCKMAN and GRAVEL GIRL struggle against their restraints.)

ROCKMAN

Confound his nefarious schemes! He won't escape from me this time.

GRAVEL GIRL

(rolls her eyes)

Yeah. Of course not.

(ROCKMAN is struggling with the restraints and doesn't hear.)

ROCKMAN

Must - reach - wrist - laser. (He struggles more and gives up, panting.) Can you reach your laser, Gravel Girl?

GRAVEL GIRL

Look, can you just call me Elaine? I mean, there's no one around.

ROCKMAN

What's wrong with Gravel Girl?

GRAVEL GIRL

What's wrong with it? First, I'm 24, I'm not a girl. Second, I'm named after rubble! It doesn't exactly strike fear into the hearts of criminals, now does it?

ROCKMAN

When we get out of here I'll think of a new one. How's Minerella sound?

GRAVEL GIRL

Like a Disney Princess.

ROCKMAN

Look, can you reach your laser or not?

GRAVEL GIRL

I can't reach my laser because you won't let me have one, remember?

ROCKMAN

Oh, right. You're still on your probationary period.

GRAVEL GIRL

Probationary period. I've helped you foil three bank robberies and a robot invasion and all you've let me have is a Swiss Army Knife with a picture of a boulder on it.

ROCKMAN

Lava Lad never sassed me like this.

GRAVEL GIRL

Well maybe you should hire Lava Lad. (Pause.) I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.

ROCKMAN

Let's just get out of here.

GRAVEL GIRL

Hold on.

(GRAVEL GIRL struggles with her right arm restraint and tears the bolt out of the wall. She frees herself from the other restraints.)

ROCKMAN

Of course! All the damp here must have rotted the concrete. (He struggles to no avail.)

GRAVEL GIRL

No, I have a bionic arm! Did you even look at my resume? Or did you just spend the whole interview staring at my tits?

ROCKMAN

You got the job, didn't you?

GRAVEL GIRL

I hope I didn't just hear that.

ROCKMAN

Please just undo my shackles so we can defuse that bomb.

GRAVEL GIRL

We?

ROCKMAN

So you can defuse the bomb. Which is the sidekick's job. You cut the blue wire - or whatever, I go after the villain.

GRAVEL GIRL

Right, I save our asses and you get the interview in Esquire. That seems fair. Especially since the only reason we got caught in the first place is because *someone* locked the damn keys in the Rockmobile!

ROCKMAN

Look, I said I was sorry! (Pause. Rueful) I don't think you have a very firm grasp of the hero-sidekick dynamic. You are my stalwart, my unflappable companion, always there to back me up, willing if necessary to lay down your life for mine-

GRAVEL GIRL

You know, I don't even have a dental plan.

ROCKMAN

This is not the time to discuss personnel issues.

GRAVEL GIRL

Actually, I think it's the perfect time for a nice (looks at bomb) six and a half-minute chat.

ROCKMAN

You wouldn't.

GRAVEL GIRL

Let's start with my salary.

ROCKMAN

Crap.

GRAVEL GIRL

What was that?

ROCKMAN

You don't have a salary!

GRAVEL GIRL

Exactly. Oh, I know, I know, I get paid "in kind" by getting to live in the mansion, full use of the Rockcycle, et cetera. But a "girl's" gotta plan for the future, you know. (Pause.) I want what Robin's making.

ROCKMAN

What? *Robin*? (Pause.) How about Batgirl?

(GRAVEL GIRL starts to head toward the exit.)

GRAVEL GIRL

(scoffing)

Gotta go.

ROCKMAN

Lava Lad was my sidekick for 14 years and he never asked for a dime! He did it for the good of mankind. (Wistful) He was the best crimefighting partner a hero could hope for.

GRAVEL GIRL

Of course he was. He was a house slave, apparently. I bet he didn't even have medical.

ROCKMAN

He had mutant healing power!

GRAVEL GIRL

Well I don't. (Counts off on fingers.) Salary. Medical. Dental. 401(k). And - a new costume. No more spike heels. Yeah, they're great for kicking people in the face, but you ever try chasing down Doctor Cheetah in these?

ROCKMAN

This is blackmail, you brigand!

GRAVEL GIRL

Look, save the invective for the criminals, okay?

ROCKMAN

Right now I'm having a little trouble telling the difference. Look, what is this really about? I doubt you would endanger our lives for a dental plan. We did a background check on you. You're noble.

GRAVEL GIRL

I am not!

ROCKMAN

What's wrong with noble?

GRAVEL GIRL

Noble is passé. I'm going for more of an antihero aesthetic.

ROCKMAN

It doesn't suit you.

GRAVEL GIRL

Then look at this as a noble act. I'm standing up to the club.

ROCKMAN

I don't understand.

GRAVEL GIRL

That's all this hero thing is, is an old boy's club. You and White Lightning, sitting around the Freedom League cocktail lounge, sipping martinis and talking about how great it is to save the world. So entitled. So *entrenched*. Do you even remember why you became a superhero?

ROCKMAN

(reciting)

My parents were killed in a rockslide caused by the Demon. Sworn to revenge, I became an expert on mineralogy and the martial arts, then adopted the name Rockman -

GRAVEL GIRL

Sworn to revenge. And how often have you battled the Demon in the last 20 years?

ROCKMAN

Oh, sixty or seventy times.

GRAVEL GIRL

And yet he's still free. Not in jail or the asylum or, I don't know, dead.

ROCKMAN

He is a crafty and a devious foe!

GRAVEL GIRL

No, you just have no follow-through. And you know why? Because you need the headlines to keep yourself going. You're as much responsible for that madman still being around as anyone. You've created a self-perpetuating battle which you can never win or lose because it means you're out of a job.

ROCKMAN

You're mad. I've dedicated my life to thwarting his dastardly plots.

GRAVEL GIRL

And then letting him get away. (Gestures to bomb.) This is a case in point. Oh by the way, four minutes. (Pause.) Three minutes fifty-five seconds. (Pause.) Three minutes fifty-

ROCKMAN

All right! You've got it. Everything you want.

GRAVEL GIRL

Everything?

ROCKMAN

Everything.

GRAVEL GIRL

Great. Let me take care of this.

(GRAVEL GIRL turns to the bomb, pulls her official Rockman knife out of her pocket and starts to work on it.)

ROCKMAN

Can you disarm it?

(Gravel Girl holds up the knife.)

GRAVEL GIRL

(sarcastic)

Piece of cake. (She starts to work, then stops.) One more question.

ROCKMAN

Bomb!

GRAVEL GIRL

What happened to Lava Lad?

ROCKMAN

You know what happened. The Black Tiger drop-kicked him into outer space.

GRAVEL GIRL

Bullshit. I don't believe you'd let him die like that. You loved him too much. I mean, strictly in a heterosexual super-life-partners sort of way. What's the real story?

ROCKMAN

If I tell you, will you defuse the bomb?

GRAVEL GIRL

Sure.

ROCKMAN

He quit. After 14 years. He ran out on me. He's trying to make it in Mexico City now. Calls himself "El Roca."

GRAVEL GIRL

Why'd he quit?

ROCKMAN

(defeated)

He said he was tired of playing second fiddle. Of braving death all the time and never getting any credit.

GRAVEL GIRL

A-ha! So you admit sidekicking is a crock.

ROCKMAN

Sounds like you don't need me to tell you that.

GRAVEL GIRL

And do you admit that superheroes are a joke too? That you're all just pulling your punches?

ROCKMAN

The Demon has spent two decades slithering from my grasp. I want nothing more than to see him -

(A noise. The door opens and the DEMON pokes his head back in.)

DEMON

Hey. Rockman.

ROCKMAN

Demon?!

DEMON

Why are you still here?

ROCKMAN

You chained us here!

DEMON

Yeah, but this was such a simple trap. I mean, I didn't even take your utility belts. I thought for sure you'd be free by now.

(GRAVEL GIRL raises her hand)

GRAVEL GIRL

I am.

DEMON

(to GRAVEL GIRL) Shush! (to ROCKMAN) You didn't think I'd let it end like this. After all we've been through together, to finish you with a mere bomb?

ROCKMAN

What did you have in mind?

DEMON

Oh, you'll see. (Laughs maniacally.) A couple more doors and you reach the tarantula pit. Then there's the room lined with motion-sensitive lasers. After that is the trapdoor into the alligator cage, then you hit the phalanx of *luchadores* and killer cyborgs. And after *that* - well, it's a surprise.

ROCKMAN

Curse your cunning machinations!

DEMON

That's the spirit! Tell you what, let me just unshackle you and give you a start on me. I didn't go through all the time and effort of arranging an intricate series of escalating challenges so you could get killed right inside the front door. Oh, and let me get that bomb for you.

(The DEMON aims a remote at the bomb and hits a button. The bomb makes a noise like a car auto-unlocking and stops ticking.)

GRAVEL GIRL

What the hell! (to ROCKMAN) Do you see what I'm talking about, Rockman?

ROCKMAN

I - I - Demon, what are you doing?

DEMON

I'm just being sporting -

ROCKMAN

Sporting? But you're a criminal! My archnemesiis! You killed my parents, you fiend!

DEMON

Oh, you should really be over that by now. I feel like we've built up a rapport since then. Don't you think?

ROCKMAN

(to himself)

My god. She's right. Gravel Girl is right.

DEMON

(to ROCKMAN)

Now about those shackles -

(DEMON starts to advance toward ROCKMAN. GRAVEL GIRL removes a laser gun from ROCKMAN's utility belt and aims it at the DEMON.)

GRAVEL GIRL

Afraid I can't let you do that. He and I are in the middle of some very delicate negotiations here.

DEMON

Please be quiet. The men are trying to talk.

ROCKMAN

Hey! Knock it off! That's my sidekick you're talking to.

GRAVEL GIRL

Thank you.

ROCKMAN

You're welcome. Now shoot him.

GRAVEL GIRL and DEMON

What?

ROCKMAN

You heard me. Shoot him. Kill him. You were right. This has gone on for far too long.

GRAVEL GIRL

Really?

DEMON

Really?

ROCKMAN

Really. And I want you to do the honors, Gravel Girl.

(GRAVEL GIRL aims the laser at a terrified DEMON and is about to fire, but eases up on the trigger. She gestures to him to move to the empty shackles.)

GRAVEL GIRL

(to DEMON)

Get into those shackles, Demon. Do it!

(DEMON shackles up his own feet. GRAVEL GIRL does the hands, pulling some rope out of ROCKMAN's utility belt to bind his right hand since the shackle is broken.)

GRAVEL GIRL

There. (to ROCKMAN) Well, you're right. I guess I am a lousy antihero.

ROCKMAN

I knew it all along. Now how about setting me free.

GRAVEL GIRL

No, I'm not gonna do that. What say you guys just hang out here. I'll call the Commissioner in a few hours and let him know where to find you. In the meantime, I suggest you have a frank discussion about the origins of your deep-seated codependent relationship. I think that'd be for the best.

(GRAVEL GIRL walks toward the door, giving Rockman a reassuring tap on the cheek along the way. He calls after her.)

ROCKMAN

Hey! Dammit! You can forget about your Christmas bonus!

(GRAVEL GIRL continues out. Pause.)

DEMON

You know, Lava Lad never pulled this crap.

(Blackout. End of play.)