Stuck in the Middle With You

by foobar137

Summary

Phineas is stuck in the airport by a sudden snowstorm, but a chance encounter with his ex-girlfriend Isabella may make the whole experience worthwhile after all. Phinbella fluff one-shot, flip side of "Storm Warning". Trope bingo: snowed in.

Notes

Trope Bingo: snowed in. I decided to go with a slightly different meaning of the phrase - the airport is snowed in, rather than Phineas and Isabella as individuals.

The airport in question is some hypothetical airport in the mountains between the east coast and Danville, near a major ski resort. (...yeah, I know. Fictional geography. Run with it.) Think Denver International Airport, but in the general vicinity of Pittsburgh, and with a hotel in the airport.

T rated for adult romance and non-sexual sharing of a bed. Nothing explicit.

This story is set in the same timeframe as “Storm Warning”, which (among other things) explains where the blizzard came from. Other than "Storm Warning," this does not share a timeline with any of my other stories.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Flynn. There's nothing I can do; no flights are going out until tomorrow at the earliest. I can book you on the 3pm flight to Danville tomorrow afternoon; there's one seat left, center seat 33E. Is that acceptable?"
Phineas sighed. Getting mad at the ticket agent wouldn't help; she was probably having the worst day of anyone involved. The unexpected blizzard had trapped him and thousands of other travelers at the airport as they tried to transfer, and she'd been busily rebooking flights and dealing with frustrated and furious customers for hours.

"That's fine. Is there any chance there's somewhere I can spend the night?"

"I'm very sorry. The hotel in the airport is completely full now, and the shuttles to other hotels nearby can't run due to the storm. We're hoping things ease up enough that the shuttles can run again; they'll be picking up people first-come first-served on the baggage-claim level."

Phineas nodded. "Thank you for your help." He sighed and headed for the food court. Dinner would be nice after an hour and a half in line, he thought. And I'm sure the line for hotel shuttles is even longer.

At the food court, he picked up a slice of pizza and a soda, then went looking for somewhere to eat them. The tables were all occupied, and pondered grabbing a chunk of wall to lean against when he noticed a familiar face. Wait, is that...Isabella? A wash of emotions ran through him at seeing his ex-girlfriend; the pain of their failed relationship was dulled from the three years since the break-up, and the love he'd once felt for her - still felt for her, if he was being honest with himself - shined out through it.

As if feeling his eyes on her, she looked up at him and hesitantly smiled in recognition. She was alone at a table, just finishing her own dinner, and gestured toward the empty seat across from her.

"Thanks, Isabella," he said, taking the seat. "Got caught on the way home for spring break too? How’s Syracuse?"

"I like it there. How’s MIT?"

"Hard. I’m not used to school being difficult."

She gave him a look of very limited sympathy, and he took the opportunity to work on his dinner. While chewing, he looked at Isabella. She’s so beautiful. Always was. Attraction never was the problem between us, though.

"So how’s your mother doing?" he asked between bites.

"She’s doing okay. She finally stopped asking me when we were getting back together when I went to college. How about your family?"

"Oh, you might not have heard. Candace and Jeremy had a baby girl, Amanda. She’s adorable - looks just like her mother. Mom and Dad are thrilled to have a grandchild."

"And Ferb?"

Phineas took another bite to collect his thoughts. "He’s doing okay, I guess. He’s at Caltech. Not coming home for spring break this year - decided to go skiing instead, actually not too far from here. I don’t know more than that - we aren’t really on speaking terms any more."

Her brow furrowed in concern. “What happened? You two were always so close.”

He sat back and took a drink, staring at the ceiling. “After you and I broke up, I got stupid for a while. Ended up taking a lot of my frustrations out on Ferb, because he was convenient and would put up with it. Until he decided not to take any more, and called me on it. I said some things I
shouldn’t have, he said some things he really should have said earlier, and...well, Candace had moved out by then, so he moved into her old room. I kept lashing out at him, playing stupid tricks. I need to apologize to him, but...I’m not sure he’d want to listen to me long enough for me to get the words out. Maybe I should do it over email.” He finished off his pizza and looked over at Isabella.

She was looking back at him with a wistful smile. “Where did we go wrong, Phineas?”

He swallowed, and looked at the table, unable to look her in the eye. “We wanted different things out of a relationship. You wanted more commitment than I could give. I wanted...as silly as it is, I wanted a girlfriend I could switch off and ignore for a while.” He looked back up, and saw her chuckling in agreement.

“So how’ve things been going at college there? Anyone special? MIT is probably a total sausagefest, isn’t it?” she asked.

“No really. It’s actually almost half women overall, although the physics department is more like eighty percent guys. But...no, nobody. I’ve been spending so much time head-down in my books that I haven’t had time. You?”

“My dating luck is the talk of the dorm. Twelve first dates, zero second dates.”

Phineas winced. “That bad? What’s the problem?”

Isabella sighed. “I wish I knew. It’s not that I’m pushing for too much commitment too fast - I found two different ways that could go wrong in high school, with you and then with Bryan.”

“What did happen with Bryan? You and I weren’t really on speaking terms at the time either.”

“He decided that it was time for me to put out. That was the trade-off; he gave me the commitment that I wanted, I gave him the sex he wanted. He just neglected to tell me that that was the deal up front, and when he did...he didn't want to take 'no' for an answer.” Isabella wrinkled her nose disdainfully.

“Ouch. That’s why he was calling you every nasty name in the book, then.”

“Pretty much. You and Renee didn’t last so long. What happened there?”

“I still hadn’t learned. She wanted a full-time boyfriend, not a part-time one. I didn’t figure out that was important until Lisa, and then she decided she didn’t want to try a long-distance relationship when we went to college.”

“Are you planning to meet up with her again?”

“Not really. I was kind of relieved when she broke it off. I already knew it couldn’t last, and...I’d finally realized that I wanted something that could.”

Isabella’s eyes searched his face as if looking for an answer to a question she didn’t dare ask.

He sighed. “I should probably go get in line for a hotel shuttle. No rooms left in the hotel in the airport, so it’s that or sleep on the floor here.”

“I’ve got a hotel room here with two beds. You can take the other one if you’d like.”

“...but...”
“Phineas, I’ve known you forever. I know I can trust you. And I’m not going to make you go wait in a huge line when you’re dead tired and I have a better option.”

*You trust me. Do I trust me?* He looked at her. *This is a bad idea, but I don’t want you to go away.* “Okay.”

The small room in the airport hotel smelled faintly of air freshener, and the pale yellow walls betrayed nothing resembling character. Her suitcase, left behind when she’d headed down for food, lay unopened on one of the beige beds. Phineas dropped his suitcase on the floor and excused himself to go into the bathroom.


Phineas returned smiling, that smile that had melted her heart so many times in the past. *I shouldn’t have done this. I’m just going to get hurt again.*

“Thank you for this, Isabella. I really wasn’t looking forward to the lines downstairs.”

“What are friends for, right?”

He paused, looking at her. “Are we friends again? I think I missed that more than anything else.”

*Friend zone, here I come. Again. “Sure. I missed it too.”*

He smiled. “We should get some sleep. It’s been a long day. Which bed would you like?”

“Doesn’t matter. I’ll take this one. Mind if I steal the bathroom to go get ready?”

“Not at all.”

Phineas pulled out his laptop and sat back on his bed as Isabella went into the bathroom.

*Talking to Isabella really helped me figure out what I need to do. Hopefully, I can find the words to say what I want here.*

He opened up his email, sent off a quick note to his parents updating them on his flight situation, and then started a message to Ferb.

*Ferb -*

I’m sorry.

I’ve been being an idiot and a jerk. I understand if you can’t forgive me. I’m not sure I deserve it after the things I said and did to you.

*But regardless of whether I deserve forgiveness, you deserve an apology.*

I apologize unreservedly.

Phineas

Phineas felt better with that off his mind. He’d extended the olive branch; that was all he could do right now.
Isabella came out wearing a loose T-shirt and sweatpants, and sat on the edge of Phineas’s bed. “Anything interesting going on?” she asked, nodding toward the laptop.

“Just sending some email.”

“Mind if I steal your laptop for a few minutes while you get ready for bed?”

“Not at all, just let me drop it into the guest account...there you go.”

He left her the laptop and went into the bathroom to brush his teeth and change clothes, and returned wearing a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. Isabella was hunched over his laptop on his bed, typing out a message. She looked up at him and smiled. “Give me just a minute? Katie needs to chat.”

“That’s fine. No rush.” He plumped up his pillows and sat back at the head of the bed.

“I’m finally ready for...well, what she was looking for then. I have no idea if it’s still what she’s looking for. I already had my shot with her, anyway. I’m sure she’s not interested in another trip down that road.

Isabella finished typing and closed the laptop, handing it over; Phineas leaned down and slid it into his bag.

“So, from your perspective, where did we go wrong?” he asked.

Her immediate response implied she’d been thinking about the answer for a while. “My imagination was writing checks my heart and brain couldn’t cash. I thought I was ready for total commitment forever, and I wasn’t even close. I had our whole lives planned out, and just assumed you’d play along. And I couldn’t bring myself to tell you any of what was going on in my head, because I’d spent so long keeping it all cooped up and *not* telling you, so it just festered.”

“I remember you planning out our grandchildren, and figuring out how to pair up our friends to provide spouses for our kids,” Phineas commented.

“Exactly. Hey, did Ferb ever get anywhere with that older girl he was interested in?”

“Who, Vanessa? Not that I know of. Weren’t you planning to marry their son off to our oldest daughter?”

Isabella laughed. “Yes. That was it - I was fifteen and planning out stuff that I’d have no control over even when it happened twenty-plus years down the road. Reality just wasn’t my strong point.”

“So what happened?”

“Eventually, the disconnect between my fantasies and reality got to be enough that not even I could paper it over. That was when we started fighting. After the breakup, I latched on to Bryan as a substitute in my fantasies, but when he started trying to force the issue, my brain hit the panic button. That wasn’t in the script.”

“And so, exit Bryan. His loss.”

“You really think so?” Isabella asked.

“Yes, yes I do,” Phineas answered.

They looked at each other in silence for a few minutes. You owe it to her as much as you did to
"Isabella...I'm sorry," he said. "For what I said at the end. I wasn’t ready for what you wanted, but that didn’t give me the right to say what I did. I’ve been kicking myself for that ever since."

She nodded, a sad smile on her face. “I’m sorry too. For putting you in that position to begin with. I always figured that’s what made you stop loving me.”

He took a deep breath. “I never did stop loving you, you know. I stopped liking you for a bit, towards the end. But I’ve always loved you.”

Isabella’s eyes started to water. “I never stopped loving you, either. Even after it all went wrong.”

He slid closer, brushing tears off her cheek even as his own eyes grew damp. “So if I still love you...and you still love me...”

She looked up at him, her tear-filled eyes wide. “Yes?” she squeaked. “Yes, I’d like to try again?”

They kissed like they were trying to make up for three years of lost time, falling sideways onto the bed, holding onto each other as if to never let go.

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She was warm against him, even through both their pajamas, as they lay tangled together under the covers; while they’d agreed it was too soon to do anything more than sleep, neither had wanted to be separated from the other overnight. The dim lights coming in through the window gave them just enough light to see each other in the dark room.

“How are we going to manage going to school five hours apart?” Isabella asked, her head resting on Phineas’s shoulder.

“We’ll make it work,” he said. “I’ll get the teleporter working again. It got disassembled in an attempt to get it through Ferb’s teleport interdiction fields. But even without it...you’re worth the trip. Although I don’t have a car. Don’t really need one around Boston, and parking’s expensive.”

“I don’t have a car either, but my roommate does. Maybe I can convince her to go on a road trip to Cambridge.”

“And while it isn’t quite the same, we’ll have video chat to see and talk to each other. But that’s something to worry about later. We’ve got a week together in Danville. What would you like to do?”

“I don’t know. Just be with you as much as I can. When does your flight leave tomorrow, by the way?”

“3pm,” Phineas said. “I got the last seat, apparently. 33E. What’s that look for?”

Isabella had leaned up on one arm to look at his face. “I’m on the same flight. Seat 33F. Phineas...do you believe in fate?” she asked earnestly.

“Somewhat. Why?”

“I figured out a long time ago that when I’m doing the right thing, things just work out right, and when I’m not, they don’t. That’s why I stopped chasing you when I was twelve or so - I finally realized that the fact that nothing I tried ever worked meant it wasn’t meant to be yet.”

Phineas nodded. “Okay.”
“This - all of this, us happening to meet here, me just happening to have an extra bed you can use, us ending up in adjacent seats - what are the odds of all that? I think fate is trying to tell us that this time, it’s right.”

“I don’t need fate to tell me that, Isabella,” he said, running his fingers through her long black hair. “I’d already figured that out.”

“Linda! What brings you to the airport? Phineas didn’t make it in last night either?” Vivian asked her friend.

“No, he got caught in that storm yesterday and is on the 6:15 flight today. When’s Isabella coming in?”

“Same flight. I wonder if they met up.”

“Probably not. And it’s not like it’d make a difference. It’s too bad things blew up so badly between them. They really did make a nice couple.” Linda sighed.

Vivian suddenly smiled and pointed. “They still do.”

Linda followed Vivian’s finger. Phineas and Isabella were walking through the exit from the gate area, holding hands and giving their mothers embarrassed smiles.

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