

SETTING: *Various locations in the Cincinnati Zoo including the Main Concourse, the Hippo House, and Santa's Workshop.*

AT RISE: *The first night of the zoo's Lights of Christmas celebrating the Christmas season. PATRONS of the zoo, as well as the MAYOR of the city, GEORGE BRAUNAGEL, the zookeeper, and his assistant MAC gather on the Main Concourse near a giant unlit Christmas Tree.*

#1 Christmas at the Cincinnati Zoo

It's Christmas... PATRON #1

It's Christmas... PATRON #2

It's Christmas... MAC

It's Christmas... GEORGE/MAYOR

It's Christmas at the Cincinnati Zoo! ALL

All year long we've waited
Through summer, spring, and fall
For wintry skies to bring us
Our favorite time of all PATRON #1

Both human folks and animals
Are making a to-do PATRON #2

And what's the big occasion? GEORGE

PATRON #1/PATRON #2/GEORGE

*It's Christmas at the Cincinnati...
At the Cincinnati Zoo!*

(PATRON #1 holds up masks of a lion and tiger.)

GEORGE

*The lions and the tigers
Are pacing side by side
Roaring out their happiness*

MAYOR

And Cincinnati pride!

*(PATRON #2 holds up masks of a monkey and a gorilla.
GEORGE holds up a mask of a giraffe and zebra.)*

MAC

*The monkeys and gorillas
Giraffes and zebras, too
Are ready now to celebrate*

GEORGE/MAYOR/MAC

*It's Christmas at the Cincinnati...
At the Cincinnati zoo*

*(NEW YORKER enters. He speaks with a Brooklyn accent. Music
continues under.)*

NEW YORKER

You sayin' this place is better than New York City at Christmas?

MAYOR

You bet.

NEW YORKER

Get outta here!

MAC

It's true!

*Rockefeller Center
Is known for its big tree*

GEORGE

*And Macy's Santa's Workshop
Is quite a sight to see*

MAYOR

*But Cincinnati's Christmas
Will change your point of view
Cuz here in Cincinnati
Is the Cincinnati Zoo!*

*(PATRON #1 holds up a penguin mask. PATRON #2 holds
up a polar bear mask.)*

PATRON #1

*The penguin and the polar bear
Both love this time of year
With frosty north winds blowing
Full of Christmas cheer*

PATRON #2

*Listen close and you might hear
Them sing a carol or two*

PENGUIN/POLAR BEAR

*Silver bells...
Silver bells...*

ALL

*It's Christmas at the Cincinnati...
At the Cincinnati zoo*

(Music continues under.)

MAYOR

Citizens of Cincinnati! As Mayor of your fine city, I am proud to stand before you today to officially open the Christmas season here at our fine zoo. Most of you know our zookeeper, Mr. George Braunagel...

(Cheers! GEORGE waves.)

George has promised me that this year's Lights of Christmas display will be the best ever!

(Cheers again.)

MAYOR (cont.)

And here to flip the switch is George's own daughter, Lois Jean!

(He gestures. Music crescendos. Special on... no one. Music out. GEORGE looks around.)

GEORGE

Oh no.

MAYOR

Lois Jean...? George, where's Lois Jean?

GEORGE

I... I'm not sure, Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR

Not sure?

GEORGE

Mac, go find Lois Jean, will you?

(MAC exits.)

Lois Jean appears to have wandered off, Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR

But she's supposed to flip the switch! To turn on the lights! To open the Christmas season!

GEORGE

Yes, but...

MAYOR

The Lights of Christmas display at the Cincinnati Zoo is tradition! Everyone expects it! They look forward to it all year long. Just look at that crowd!

(He points to the audience.)

GEORGE

Yes, sir, but...

MAYOR

You came to me, George. You asked me – you *begged* me – to let Lois Jean flip the switch. You said she was having a hard time, with her mother being gone and all, and that flipping the switch might make her feel special...

GEORGE

Mr. Mayor...

MAYOR

And I said yes, George. I agreed to help you out, even though I had already promised the job to my drycleaner's grandkid. Now here I stand, in a wrinkled suit with ring-around-the-collar, ready to *open the Christmas season*, and there's no one here to flip the switch.

GEORGE

Why don't you do it, Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR

Me?! Oh no, I couldn't... I mean, I shouldn't...

(GEORGE steps forward and addresses the Crowd.)

GEORGE

Ladies and Gentlemen, there's been a change of plans. Tonight, the person who will flip the switch on our Lights of Christmas display is none other than the most beloved person in Cincinnati – our Mayor!

(GEORGE starts to clap. PATRONS and hopefully the audience join in.)

MAYOR

Thank you, thank you! Oh my – thank you so much. I've always dreamed of... but I never dared hope that such an honor... I'm flattered, truly flattered. I mean, just look at me, a boy from the West Side who worked hard every day, who...

GEORGE

Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR

What?

GEORGE

Flip the switch.

MAYOR

Oh yes. Of course. Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you... The Lights of Christmas!

*(He flips the switch. Christmas lights turn on all over the stage.
This should be sensational! Beautiful! Cheers! MAC enters.)*

#1a Christmas at the Cincinnati Zoo (reprise)

NEW YORKER

Gotta hand it to you – you Cincinnati people know what you're doin'!

NEW YORKER

*The holly and the ivy
Are festive on their own
But once the lights are turned on
Another world is shown*

MAYOR

*A merry winter wonderland
Has sparkled into view
It's Christmas at the Cincinnati...*

GEORGE

It's Christmas at the Cincinnati...

ALL

Yes it's Christmas at the Cincinnati Zoo!

(All exit except GEORGE and MAC.)

GEORGE

Well, Mac? Where is she?

MAC

Where you'd expect.

GEORGE

The Hippo House?

MAC

You know how much Lois Jean loves them hippopotamuses.

GEORGE

Just like her mother.

MAC

And now with Big Suzy ready to give birth...

GEORGE

Big Suzy's baby isn't due for six more weeks.

MAC

Well, Lois acts like that baby hippo's gonna be born any minute. When I told her it was time to light the Tree, she said "Not now, Mac – Big Suzy needs me." Like she's some doctor or midwife or something.

GEORGE

I better go check on her.

MAC

You do that, boss. You do that. Meanwhile, I'll go make sure the workshop is ready. Skip is coming tomorrow night.

GEORGE

Skip?

MAC

Skip Greenbaum.

(GEORGE is confused.)

The guy we hire every year to play Santa Claus?

GEORGE

Oh, yeah, yeah...

MAC

He's gonna be here tomorrow night, remember? First, we light the Tree, then Santa Claus shows up...

GEORGE

Right, right...

MAC

You okay, boss?

GEORGE

I'm fine. Santa's coming. What could go wrong?

#2 Transition to Hippo House (underscoring)

(MAC exits. GEORGE exits opposite as the scene shifts to the Hippo House. BIG SUZY enters and sits behind a barrier of some sort. LOIS JEAN enters opposite and sits next to her, on the outside of the barrier. She reaches across to stroke BIG SUZY.)

LOIS JEAN

There, now, Big Suzy – it's okay. It's okay.

(GEORGE enters.)

GEORGE

Lois Jean! What are you doing?!

(He rushes to her. LOIS JEAN pulls her hand back.)

LOIS

Talking to Big Suzy.

GEORGE

You weren't just talking to her, Lois Jean. You were touching her. You are never, ever supposed to do that!

LOIS JEAN

But she likes it.

GEORGE

You don't know that. Hippos are wild animals...

LOIS JEAN

Big Suzy isn't wild. She lives here with us, in the zoo.

GEORGE

She's still a wild animal, honey – and wild animals need to be treated with respect.

LOIS JEAN

I know, Daddy, but...

GEORGE

Hippos are very territorial. They don't like anyone invading their space. Not even little girls...

LOIS JEAN

But Daddy...

GEORGE

It scares them. And when they get scared, they might bite. Just look at Big Suzy's teeth. One chomp and you'd be gone.

LOIS JEAN

Big Suzy would never do that, would you, Big Suzy?

(BIG SUZY grunts.)

LOIS (cont.)

See, Daddy?

GEORGE

Lois Jean, I'm serious. Promise me you'll never touch Big Suzy again.

LOIS JEAN

Mommy touched her all the time.

GEORGE

Your mother is a zoologist. Working with hippos is her specialty.

LOIS JEAN

I know. That's why she left us. Abandoned us.

GEORGE

She didn't abandon...

LOIS JEAN

She's not here, is she?

GEORGE

Honey, we've talked about this. Your mother went to Africa because she was awarded a fellowship to study hippos in the wild. It's a big deal. A once-in-a-lifetime chance. You should be proud of her.

LOIS JEAN

Are you proud of her?

GEORGE

Of course I am.

LOIS JEAN

Then why did you fight about it?

GEORGE

Fight...?

LOIS JEAN

I heard you, Daddy. The night she left. You thought I was asleep, but I could hear you though the wall...

#3 Lois Jean's Memory (underscoring)

(In flashback, DOLLY FRIZZOTI enters with a suitcase. They both turn to watch her. DOLLY places her suitcase on the floor. GEORGE enters the flashback.)

	GEORGE
So. This is it. You're really leaving.	
	DOLLY
George...	
	GEORGE
Abandoning your husband and child...	
	DOLLY
You know that's not true. This fellowship...	
	GEORGE
...is more important than your family. I get it, Dolly.	
	DOLLY
I asked you to come with me.	
	GEORGE
And expose Lois Jean to all that danger?	
	DOLLY
This isn't about Lois Jean. This is about you.	
	GEORGE
Me...?	
	DOLLY
Now that I might be considered an expert at something, you feel threatened...	
	GEORGE
That's not true!	
	DOLLY
Your position here matters more than me. More than Lois Jean...	
	GEORGE
I love my daughter!	