

LESLEY WHEELER

Breeder Zoo

Asha the elephant, stained
with red Virginia clay,
lifts her ears toward the falling
clamor. Love begins again and again,
even in cages.

Like a hot sandcastle, the cougar
crumbles onto his grumbling
mate, gold over brown.

Their landslide rouses the whole
plantation. One human family leans
agape; the fence brands them.

Unnamed bear cubs, boozy
with milk, wait to be sold.

Asha's baby watches a man harness
an old mattress to his dam's back.
White children clamber on. Asha feels
along the platform with her trunk,
touches a human mother's sneaker.
No one hears what she's trying to say.