

Parsimonious

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I remember the first time I looked it up—
I was a sophomore—Michael
Wallace was sitting on my bed
petting my cat Menalousche which
I got from a poem by Yeats—the name
I got from Yeats—I don't recall
where I got the cat. We were both
English majors. I didn't much like
the way he was petting her—it was
what I guess you could call heavy
petting—insisting he could make her purr
by scratching her in the place underneath
her chin. But she wouldn't purr for him
no matter how hard he scratched or
petted—and he was scratching hard
and petting heavy. "Hostovsky,
you have a parsimonious cat," he said,
and left the room. Just like that. And I knew—
though I didn't know what parsimonious

meant—I knew deeply, saw clearly, that notwithstanding his generous vocabulary, Michael Wallace would not succeed in love. Not ever. This I understood the way you understand a thing without any words. Then I reached for the dictionary, and Menalousche jumped up into my lap and without my touching her—my thumbs were in the thumb-indices—starting purring very loud.