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Cardinal Red

by Kent Hiatt

There's no accounting for his color.

Tulip red is much too bold for birds
in Nature's predatory world; flowers
get away with look-at-me flamboyance;
in the animal kingdom, prudence dictates
lower profiles and subtle fashion sense.

Now take the robin—he's conservative.

Despite the red-breast name his overall
appearance is subdued, the vest no more
than an orange-brown accessory
that complements a mostly modest look;
he's right at home with the earth-tone set.

But not my flashy friend; for him to blend,
he'd have to stand beside a fire hydrant;
fading in the background doesn't seem
to be his style though; the limelight guides
him with its beacon to a landing on
my open lawn like it was center stage;
and there he stands, unprotected, acting
unconcerned and cavalier, almost cocky,
even as the neighbor's cat is eying him
and staking out a place behind the fence.

It makes no sense to me, defying order
and denying preservation's instinct;

Nature doesn't offer explanations though;
and Beauty never justifies itself.

