A curtain of yellow, orange and pink peeks above the mountains of rural West Virginia, their dark caps shrouded in fog. As the sky fills with these bright colors, the whippoorwills stop their relentless chant and the owls silently swoop to their roosts.

But, the world is awakening around them. The strong, melodic warble of the blue grosbeak fills the mountain meadows as cars start and dogs bark in the farms and towns below. As the vibrant shades of yellow, orange and pink fade to a light blue, the air fills with all the sounds, sights and smells of a morning in the mountains.

The strawberry-colored summer tanager, standing out in the green leaves of a buckeye tree, sings loudly. As he sings his buzzy song, he announces his presence to the truck bouncing down a twisty gravel road, the plump farm cat slinking in the shadows of a marsh and the red-winged blackbirds trilling from the cattails. But, he has one goal in mind—attracting a mate with his song.

The summer tanager flies up the road, singing as he whizzes by the marsh, small farms and tangled thickets in which prairie warblers poke around for caterpillars and tree crickets. He passes the blue grosbeak and slowly makes his way up the mountaintop, where the green trees below stretch out like an Appalachian granny’s patchwork quilt.

At the top of the mountain, the tanager points his wings into a dense patch of forest and over a babbling brook, meeting eyes with a hopping Louisiana waterthrush as he prepares to land.
He perches on a moss-covered rock and sings over and over. His song unanswered, he takes flight again, following the brook as his buzzy notes fill the air. It was the promise of a mate that brought him to this mountain forest to spend the summer.

Finally, a glimpse of mustard yellow catches his eye as he alights on a low branch- a female! She has seen him and he has seen her. They chase each other along the brook, through the forest and down the mountain until they spy a tall tree perfect for a nest.

Soon, there will be eggs, then nestlings. Once the fuzzy pink babies have grown and left the nest, it will be fall and the patchwork of trees will turn bright shades of red, yellow and orange. The days will grow cooler and the summer tanager will leave for the tropics.

Winter will come to the mountains, then spring. But, no matter what happens, the colorful, musical splendor of a summer morning in the mountains will return.