Once upon a time, Scholar Sukyŏng and a girl named Aengyŏn lived in a village. Scholar Sukyŏng was fifteen years old and Aengyŏn was fourteen. Since Sukyŏng’s parents wanted to marry their son to Aengyŏn, they arranged a matchmaker to get the opinion of the bride-to-be. Although the first and second attempts came up empty-handed, on the third visit Sukyŏng’s parents reluctantly said they would agree to a marriage proposal. Finally, Sukyŏng’s parents approved the marriage when the flowers of Sukyŏng family’s house leaned down towards Aengyŏn’s house and flowers of Aengyŏn family’s house leaned down towards Sukyŏng’s house.

Scholar Sukyŏng went to a fortune-teller at the lower village to get a marriage horoscope before the marriage. The fortune-teller analysed the marriage horoscope and saw that the marriage horoscopes for the groom Sukyŏng and the bride Aengyŏn were as follows: Kapchaŭlch’uk read ‘steel under the ocean’, Pyŏnginchŏngmyo read ‘fire in a furnace’, Muchinkisa read ‘tree in a deep forest’, Kyŏngsinmi read ‘dirt on a road’, Imsinkyeyu read ‘steel for the tip of a sword’, Kapsinulyu read ‘water in a fountain’, Muinkimyo read ‘dirt for a fortress foundation’, Kyŏngchinsinsa read ‘lead for solder’, and Imokyemi read ‘a weeping tree’. This was an excellent marriage horoscope.

Using this, the fortune-teller chose a wedding day for Sukyŏng. The courtship should be the third day of March, the marriage ceremony should be the eighth day of April in the year of kapin, and the departure to the groom’s household should be the fifteenth day of June. Both parents invested deeply in providing the necessary articles for Sukyŏng and Aengyŏn’s marriage. It suffices to say that their marriage articles even included a tiger’s eyebrow. With the courtship getting closer, Sukyŏng wrote a gift letter and sent some sealed packages. It said, ‘This courtship was prepared with imported silk from China; Wŏlgwang (moonlight) Silk which was woven at night and Ilgwang (sunlight) Silk which was woven during the daytime. Among the eight packages, five packages are for the bride and the rest are gifts for her family.’

Three years passed after they married, but they still had no offspring.

Now, forty years had crept upon Sukyŏng and Aengyŏn unawares, but they still had no offspring.

One fine day, Sukyŏng went to a mountain in front of his house for a picnic with his servant. While enjoying the azalea and impatiens blossoms all around
him, he also saw chirping swallows returning to the woods. Curious, he followed their path and noticed the swallows feeding worms to their chicks in a three-year-old nest. All of a sudden, Sukyŏng felt miserable for himself. When he returned home, he was so depressed that he lost his appetite and went straight to bed.

‘Honey, why are you crying after going out to see the flower blossoms?’ asked Aengyŏn.

‘How come we can’t have children like all the other creatures in the world? I dreamed of hearing the sounds of our children. I even envy a bird its chicks’, replied Sukyŏng.

Then Aengyŏn said, ‘Honey, why don’t you ask a fortune-teller? I know that there was a very famous fortune-teller in the province of Kyŏngsang when I married you.’

So Sukyŏng put some gold nuggets in a small bag and went to the fortune-teller to ask about his fortune.

‘You need to be a man of virtue and offer devotions, then you may have children. First, offer your prayers at the Kŭmsang Temple in Mount Ane for one hundred days. Then, you must do the following tasks in one day. Together, you must irrigate the lower field if there is water in the upper field. However, you must irrigate the upper field if there is water in the lower field. Then you must plant rice grains in the field, grow them, harvest them and hull them. You must hull three mal⁴ and three tŏe⁵ of white rice. Then bring five kŭn⁶ of yellow candles, five kŭn of white candles, five kŭn of big candles, five kŭn of yellow paper, five kŭn of white paper and five kŭn of large paper to the Kŭmsang Temple on Mount Anae to pray for the Inwang Buddha, the Kŭmgang Buddha and the Life Grandmother Goddess. Pray for conception for three months and ten days to those gods’, said the fortune-teller.

After Sukyŏng and Aengyŏn offered a Buddhist mass in Kŭmsang Temple for one hundred days, they returned to their home. They prepared their bed with silk bedding and Mandarian duck pillows, surrounded by a portrait folding screen and a still-life folding screen. Sukyŏng and Aengyŏn went to bed and their two bodies became one, like blue and yellow dragons tangled together. After this, Aengyŏn began showing signs of pregnancy. At this point, Aengyŏn was forty years old. She had a strong appetite after three months; she smelled uncooked rice from cooked rice, she smelled powder from rice cakes and she smelled yeast from soybean paste. After ten months, she gave birth to a baby boy. It was a very handsome boy with a face that shone like the sun and the moon.

But three and seven days after his birth, the boy did not open his eyes at all. Sukyŏng and Aengyŏn realized that their son was blind and said, ‘Oh, merciless nature! Merciless saint! What could possibly bring happiness to our lives since we have a blind son, what can he do for us?’ They named the baby Kŏbuki⁷ and hired a nanny to take care of him.

The couple went to bed together again when their son was three years old and again the wife became pregnant. Again, she had a strong appetite and