## Quillbot, Simple:

Li Cunxin is born into a poor family commune in a small Shandong Province village. He is destined to work as a labourer in the fields. Li seems confused by the rough preliminary inspection screening at the provincial capital city of Qingdao. At first, he wasn't picked, but his teacher suggested him during a school trip, and then he was. He was chosen to go to Beijing to try out for a spot at Madame Mao's Dance Academy. After passing a series of physical tests, he was accepted into the ballet school.

The next step is seven years of hard training. He has trouble at the academy, where he doesn't do well because he misses his home. There's no room for flexibility in his strict schedule, where he has to balance long dance classes with hard academic classes. He also tries to join the Communist youth party and has to go through tough interviews. If he is accepted, he has to spend more time at meetings. But Cunxin doesn't care because he now has a job: to serve glorious Communism. When he gets a new teacher who is less likely to yell, his view of dance changes. He stresses having fun and knowing your strengths and weaknesses more. Teacher Xiao keeps an eye on Cunxin and sees something that none of the other teachers have seen yet. The teacher is also different from others at the academy because he loves classical ballet, which is too Western for the school to teach (as opposed to the politically motivated, strident form favoured by Madame Mao). Teacher Xiao's advice and encouragement, along with his own drive and courage, help him stay at the top of the class and get more and more roles. Because of this, the Academy reluctantly lets him go to Ben Stevenson's Houston Ballet company as a visiting student for six weeks. This is because the government has become less strict about censoring Western culture because of changes in power.

When he gets to the U.S., he starts to question the things he was taught by the Chinese Communist Party. People in America don't look like dirty capitalists, and the size and wealth of the buildings and people make it clear that China is the poor country and not America. But he knows it's too dangerous to say this out loud, so when he gets back to China, even though he loved everything about America, he tones it down and says some Communist propaganda for the report so he can come back in two months. But, even though he lied, the government won't let him go back to the U.S. Three months later, he gets his visa and goes. This time, he dances in the Houston Ballet for a whole year. He starts a secret relationship with Elizabeth Mackey, an aspiring American dancer. He does this in secret so that his government doesn't find out and send him back. He is quickly given the position of soloist and given five more months. In the last month, Cunxin has been reluctant to leave, so he and Elizabeth hurry to get married so that Cunxin can stay in the U.S. for good. This way, Cunxin won't have to defect, which could hurt his family. When Li went to the Chinese Consulate to tell them about his decision and try to stop Stevenson from getting in trouble, the resident Chinese diplomat detained him forcibly to try to get him to go back to China. When Li continued to refuse to go, the Party agreed to let him stay but took away his citizenship and said he could never go back to the country where he was born. Cunxin keeps dancing because he cares about his family, but his marriage to Elizabeth ends in divorce, which he blames on the fact that he is young and from a different culture.

Cunxin quickly becomes a principal dancer. He dances in many premieres and wins awards, but he hurts his back badly and can't dance for more than two months. Even though he had a setback, he kept dancing, and soon after, his parents were able to come to America to see him after being cut off from them for six years. They come to see him in the Nutcracker. When they see each other again, they cry, and the audience stands up to applaud. Li meets and marries Mary McKendry, an Australian ballerina, and the two finally move back to Li's old village. Cunxin sees his old teacher, Xiao, and performs for him and his parents. He feels a lot of guilt because his life is so different from that of the rest of the village, but he tries to feel better by thinking that he has done everything his mother ever wanted for him. When they get back to America, they keep dancing.

Sophie, Cunxin and Mary's first child, is born with severe hearing loss, which breaks their hearts. Mary quits her job to take care of Sophie, and as a result, Sophie has a normal life and takes dance classes to follow in her parents' footsteps. They have two more healthy children, but decide to move to Australia, where Mary is from. Their last show, Romeo and Juliet, is shown live to 500 million Chinese people all over the country. He keeps dancing when he gets to Australia, but he also gets a job running one of the biggest stock brokerage firms there. He keeps going back to see his mother and the village where he grew up. He will never forget where he came from.