## Quillbot, Standard:

Li Cunxin is doomed to work as a labourer in the fields after being born into a low-income family located in a little rural Shandong Province hamlet. Li is perplexed by the stern preliminary inspection screening in the provincial capital city of Qingdao after first being passed over but ultimately being chosen on the advice of his teacher during a school visit. He is accepted into Madame Mao's Dance Academy's dance school after being chosen to fly to Beijing to apply for a spot there.

Followed by seven years of demanding instruction. As he attempts to deal with his homesickness, he suffers in the academy and performs poorly. There is no room for flexibility in the tight timetable, which requires him to balance long dancing lessons with demanding academic coursework. He also runs for the Communist Youth Party, making it through tough interviews and devoting more of his time to meetings after he is in. Cunxin doesn't mind, though, because he has a new calling: serving the beautiful Communism. A new dancing instructor who is less prone to yell transforms his pessimistic perspective on the discipline. He emphasises the importance of understanding one's talents and shortcomings and of having fun. When other instructors hadn't yet seen it, Teacher Xiao maintains an eye on Cunxin. Additionally, the instructor (dangerously) deviates from the academy norms due to his commitment to classical ballet, which is viewed as being too Western to be taught at the institution (as opposed to the politically motivated, strident form favoured by Madame Mao). His courage and tenacity, together with Teacher Xiao's guidance and inspiration, enable him to rise to the top of the class and be given an increasing number of duties. Since a result, the Academy reluctantly grants him permission to study overseas for six weeks with Ben Stevenson's Houston Ballet company, as the government has loosened its restrictions on Western culture as a result of changes in power.

He starts to doubt the Chinese Communist Party rules he was raised under in the United States. The sheer richness and scale of the structures and the people there plainly show that China is the impoverished nation, not America, which is not packed with filthy-looking businessmen. Even though he adored every aspect of America, he knows it would be harmful to express this attitude, so upon returning to China, he mutes it and recites Communist propaganda in order for the report to be submitted and for him to be able to return in two months. The government, however, won't allow him come back to the United States despite the falsehoods. He finally obtains his visa three months later, and he departs—this time to perform in the Houston Ballet for an entire year. In order to prevent his government from learning about it and deporting him, he begins a covert relationship with ambitious American dancer Elizabeth Mackey. He receives a soloist position soon and is given five more months. Cunxin has been reluctant to go for the last month, so he and Elizabeth hurry their nuptials so that Cunxin can stay in the United States permanently and prevent a defection that would have negative effects on his family. When Stevenson goes to the Chinese Consulate to make his announcement, the resident Chinese diplomat forcibly detains Li in an effort to force him to return to China; when he doesn't, the Party concedes to release him and let him stay, but revokes his citizenship and says he can never go back to the country of his birth. Cunxin, who is very concerned for his family, keeps dancing, but his marriage to Elizabeth ends in divorce for reasons he attributes to his youth and cultural differences.

Cunxin is swiftly elevated to the position of principle dancer, appearing in multiple premieres, and taking home honours. However, he had a serious back injury that rendered him incapacitated for more than two months. He persists in dancing despite the setback, and after six years of being cut off from his family, the Chinese authorities soon permitted his parents to visit him in America. They show there to see him perform in the Nutcracker, and when they are reunited, they start to cry as the audience applauds them. Mary McKendry, an Australian ballerina, and Li eventually return to Li's hometown after their marriage. Cunxin visits his former teacher, Teacher Xiao, and gives a performance for him and his parents. He feels a strange amount of guilt for the stark contrast between his life and that of the rest of the village, but he consoles himself by realising that he has achieved everything his mother ever wanted for him. They continue dancing after they get back to America.

To Cunxin and Mary's dismay, Sophie, their first child, is born severely deaf. Sophie has enjoyed a normal childhood as a result of Mary giving up her work to care for her, enrolling in dancing courses to follow in her parents' footsteps. They have two more healthy children in the future but choose to relocate to Mary's place of origin, Australia. Romeo and Juliet, their final performance, is televised live to 500 million spectators across China. He continues to dance while living in Australia, but he also manages one of the country's biggest stock trading houses. He keeps going back to see his mother and his hometown, never forgetting his roots.