## Quillbot, Fluency:

Li Cunxin is born into a poor family located in a tiny rural hamlet in Shandong Province, where he is destined to work as a labourer in the fields. Li is perplexed by the brusque preliminary inspection screening at the provincial capital city of Qingdao, where he was first ignored but picked after a proposal by his teacher during a school visit. He is chosen to fly to Beijing to audition for a position in Madame Mao's Dance Academy, and after passing a series of physical exams, he is admitted to its ballet school.

Seven years of rigors preparation ensue. He suffers in the academy, unable to flourish as a result of his homesickness. There is no freedom inside the strict timetable, which requires him to balance hours of dancing instruction with hard scholastic classes. He also advocates for membership in the Communist Youth Party, surviving tough interviews; once admitted, he devotes an additional percentage of his time to meetings. But Cunxin doesn't mind; he has a new mission: to serve glorious Communism. The entrance of a new teacher, less prone to yell, alters his bleak attitude on dancing. He emphasises having fun and understanding one's own skills and shortcomings. Teacher Xiao keeps an eye on Cunxin, detecting something that the other instructors haven't. The teacher also (dangerously) distinguishes from the other teachers at the academy due to his commitment to classical ballet, which is regarded too Western to be taught at the institution (as opposed to the politically motivated, strident form favoured by Madame Mao). His persistence and courage, along with Teacher Xiao's counsel and incentive, allow him to rise to the top of the class and be given more important duties. As a result, the Academy reluctantly allows him to travel overseas since a visiting student to Ben Stevenson's Houston Ballet company for six weeks, as the government has relaxed its restriction of Western culture owing to political upheavals.

He begins to doubt the Chinese Communist Party instructions on which he was nurtured in the United States. America is not full with filthy-looking capitalists, and the sheer richness and size of the buildings and people clearly imply that China, not America, is the poorest country. However, he realises that expressing this attitude is too hazardous, so upon his return to China, he tones it down and recites some Communist propaganda in order for the report to be submitted and for him to return in two months. Despite the falsehoods, the government refuses to allow him return to the United States. Three months later, he obtains his visa and departs—this time for a full year of dancing with the Houston Ballet. He begins a covert affair with young American dancer Elizabeth Mackey, hoping that his government will not find out and deport him. He is promptly promoted to soloist and given another five months. Cunxin is reluctant to leave in the last month, so he and Elizabeth expedite their marriage so that Cunxin can remain in the United States permanently, avoiding a defection that could have ramifications for his family. When Stevenson visits the Chinese Consulate to announce his decision, the resident Chinese diplomat forcibly detains Li in order to coerce his return to China; when he continues to refuse to go willingly, the Party agrees to release and allow him to stay, but revokes his citizenship and declares he can never return to the land of his birth. Cunxin continues to dance out of worry for his family, but his marriage to Elizabeth ends in divorce, which he blames on his youth and cultural differences.

Cunxin is soon promoted to lead dancer, performing in multiple premieres and earning prizes, but he suffers a terrible back injury that keeps him out of commision for more than two months. Despite the setback, he continues to dance, and the Chinese government soon permitted his parents to visit him in America after six years of being apart from his family. They arrive to see him in the Nutcracker and sob as they reconnect, and the audience applauds. Li meets and marries Australian dancer Mary McKendry, and they eventually return to his hometown. Cunxin visits his old teacher Xiao and performs for him and his parents, but he feels an unexplained degree of remorse for the great disparity in how he lives and how the rest of the village lives, but he calms himself by believing that he has accomplished all his mother ever wanted for him. They return to America and resume their dance.

Sophie, Cunxin and Mary's first child, is profoundly deaf, much to their chagrin. Mary puts up her work to care for daughter, and Sophie has enjoyed a normal childhood as a result, attending dancing courses in order to follow in her parents' footsteps. They raise two more healthy children before deciding to go to Mary's native country of Australia. Their last performance, Romeo and Juliet, is televised live to 500 million people in China. In Australia, he continues to dance while simultaneously working as the manager of one of the country's top stock trading businesses. He continues to visit his mother and village, never forgetting his roots.