

Heather Mills

Instructor's Name

ENGL 1013

Date

Secret Mission

After I suit up and gather the materials I need for the day, I walk into the main room of the military base. A man tells me the next steps I must take to reach my destination for the day. I pull out my small notepad and begin to copy down the instructions, and I judge by how many steps are needed that the mission must be difficult. After the man hands me my bag of supplies and gadgets, I look to the man and ask, "Where exactly am I going?" The tall man stares down at me and answers, "school." I now know something that is unbeknownst to most Americans, that getting to school in Japan can be quite difficult. I realize that it almost seems like a secret mission.

First, my parents take me to the train station by car. The drive is relaxing because out the window, stretching beside the narrow road, lie miles and miles of fields. Though I am not quite sure what is being grown, the sight makes the drive interesting. Another enjoyable aspect is the music floating through the air. My eyes find the source of the music, my music player, and I smile as the name of the artist and the title scroll by: "Bold and Delicious" by Ayumi Hamasaki. Towards the end of the drive, I look out and see other students walking or riding bikes to the train station (which is an alternative for those that live within the city). But when one lives out in the farmlands, a car is the fastest way. After only five minutes pass, we arrive in front of the train station, just a few minutes before the train departs. This is where I meet my friends.

After I get together with my friends, we head into the train station. I slide my card

through the machine, which allows me through the gate. Other students wait around as well, wearing their school uniforms. Finally, the train arrives, and around one hundred of us cram into the tiny section of the train. When the doors close, people relax, trying to get some breathing room. Kanae, Yuki, and I stand next to the door, watching the world go by on our journey. Every two to three minutes, a voice sounds over the intercom announcing the next stop. Ten minutes pass until we reach our destination; the trains in Japan are always on time.

Once the crowds of people disperse from the train, we go for a small walk. Getting through the large crowds of people in the train station is always hectic. Just escaping from the masses takes four minutes. However, once we are outside, the view is stupendous. Tall shiny buildings and large vibrant signs catch my eye while I walk. We follow the groups of uniformed students as we prepare for our next task. Although the walking is literally less than a mile, maneuvering through the people takes at least six minutes.

Finally, the bike storage draws into sight. We enter the bike storage and greet the man who owns the two-story building. My bike is on the second floor. I walk up the stairs and hurry to my bike to unlock it. I pull it out, following the students down the ramp and outside. After Kanae and Yuki come out with their bikes, we ride off down the sidewalk. Many intriguing sights can be seen on this part of the mission: buildings, neighborhoods, train tracks, fields, and even more students. It usually takes five minutes to ride out of town and towards the school. Just because we can see the school in the distance, it does not mean that it is close; I know that anxiousness sometimes tricks the brain. While crossing over streets and waiting at stoplights, fifteen minutes can easily fly by. On the off chance that it does indeed rain, I carry an umbrella, but riding a bike and holding an umbrella over my head can be quite difficult, especially when the wind picks up. Making sure my skirt does not fly up can add another five minutes to the

journey. Soon the school draws closer, and I follow my two friends into the schoolyard, stopping at the bike racks. My secret mission concludes here; school now begins.

While this was my normal route when I lived in Japan, there are still many other ways to get to school. If it was storming or raining, my parents might drive me to school, or I could take the bus from the train station to a stop near the school and walk the rest of the way. However, Japanese students usually need a car, a train, a pair of legs, and a bike to get to school on time. Every day I went to school in Japan, the “secret mission” would begin anew, bringing a newfound excitement each time.