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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Elfstedentocht or the Eleven Cities Tour

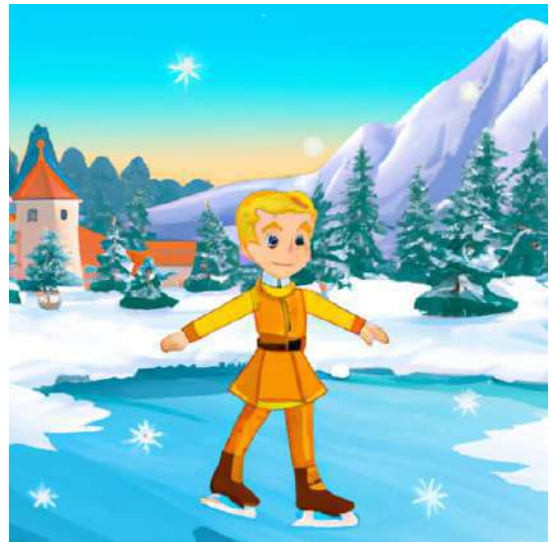
Once upon a time, in the beautiful province of Friesland in the Netherlands, there was a magical ice skating tour called the Elfstedentocht. It was the biggest ice skating tour in the world, and it was held on natural ice. The distance was almost 200 kms long. The tour passed through 11 towns, and skaters could choose to participate in either the speed skating category or the leisure skating category.

Every year, the Dutch people waited anxiously for winter to arrive, hoping that the ice would be thick enough to hold the Elfstedentocht. The ice had to be at least 15 centimeters thick before the tour could be announced, and it had to be held within 48 hours of the announcement.

It was a great honour to receive a bib and be able to participate in the Elfstedentocht, but not everyone was able to do so. It happened that the Netherlands had a young prince and ever since he heard the story about the most memorable Elfstedentocht in 1963 from his grandfather he was determined to participate one day. He asked his grandfather again and again to tell him the story about the "hell of 63". It gruesome tour was named this due to the extreme cold weather, snow, and wind. Only 69 out of 10,000 participants were able to

finish the tour, and the winner became a national hero. Many skaters suffered from frostbite, broken limbs, and damaged eyes as a result of the harsh conditions.

Every chance he got, the prince practiced his skating skills. He skated at the indoor rink, in faraway cold lands, and even incognito on the natural ice in the Dutch landscapes. He worked hard and never gave up, even when the winters were warm and the Elfstedentocht was cancelled. Many years passed and the boy grew older and older, but always practicing and never giving up hope.



But one year was different. When the prince woke up on the morning of his 18th birthday, he opened his window and felt the chill in the air. He knew right away that this was the year he had been waiting for. Weeks of cold weather had passed, and finally, the Elfstedentocht was announced! And because the prince was a loyal and active member of the Elfstedentocht association, he received a bib. The prince's heart raced with excitement as he prepared for the big event. He put on his warmest skating gear and headed to the starting line, ready to take on the challenge.

As he skated along the frozen canals, the prince felt alive like never before. He was pushing himself to the limit, but he didn't mind. He had to endure many

challenges, sometimes coming to spots where the ice was too thin to skate on. These were called kluning points, and the skaters had to get off the ice and walk on their skates to the next safe point on the ice.

This was his dream, and he was determined to make it a reality. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the prince crossed the finish line. He was exhausted, but he was also the happiest he had ever been. He had proven to himself and to the world that anything was possible if you set your mind to it. He had skated incognito, but revealed himself at the finish. The crowd wild and was very proud of their future king.

After the prince participated, the tour was only held one more time. It's been 25 years since the last Elfstedentocht.

To ease the pain of not having had the Elfstedentocht for so many years, many Dutch skaters participate in the alternative Elfstedentocht held every year on the Weissensee in Austria. And even though it is not the same as skating on the natural ice in Friesland, it is a way for them to keep the dream of participating in the legendary Elfstedentocht alive.