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Welcome, the Dog

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There was once an old woman who lived alone, and her only companion was a large dog named Fred.

Fred grew old and sick. He could barely wag his tail when she asked how he was feeling. He would just look up at her with his dark eyes, making soft sounds in his throat — which in dog language meant: *Don't worry so much. Your sadness makes me sad.*

But Fred kept getting worse, and the dog doctor came and said he was dying of old age. Poor faithful Fred. He seemed to know how much she would miss him, and he hated to go.

One long night, Fred lay with his head in her lap, dozing off and on. By morning his breathing had stopped. She sat with him for a long time, and her tears fell into his shaggy fur.

Some weeks passed.

One morning, she was sitting by the window watching the village street when a large dog appeared at her door. He looked rather like Fred — the same shaggy build — but he was young, and he jumped and bounded with an energy Fred hadn't had in years.

Scratch, scratch went his paws on the door.

She got up slowly and let him in.

"And whose dog are you?" she asked.

The dog looked at her for a moment. Then he jumped up and licked her hand, as if to say: *Yours, if you'll have me.*

She gave him milk and a bone, and while he was busy with the bone she put on her bonnet and shawl. Together they walked the length of the village street — the dog running ahead and doubling back, always returning to her side.

At every house, she asked the same question: "Do you know where this dog came from?"

The answer was always the same: "Never seen him before. But he looks a bit like Fred. Maybe one of Fred's grandchildren — you'd better keep him."



She stopped in the middle of the street and looked down at him.

"I'll call you Welcome," she said. "Because that's what you were to me — very, very welcome."

A few tears came, but this time they came from joy.

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