

Dear Julie,

It's your birthday and one of those extra special days.
It gives me the opportunity to tell you what you mean in so many different ways.

As a pup I came to a new home after being separated from my mother.
Little did I know that I was coming to a house where I would get to replace one with another.

You have treated me with love and kindness and catered for all my wants and needs.
You weren't sure about me at first, and were horrified, but willing to get a companion for Niamh.

You didn't know that I'd dig a hole in your heart and with a waggy tail walk right in.
Padding on the floor with popcorn smelling paws, ready to cuddle on a whim.

I always love being close to you and I like waking you up with a lick of my tongue.
It's important that I excitedly let you know that another day together has begun.

Where I can ride in the van with Francis and lie on my blankies in the back seat.
At least I don't fall off the dash in the truck any more and throw myself on his knees.

I must guard and protect my humans and bark at everyone whether I know them or not.
I need to announce every arrival and keep an eye on the kitchen in case they're hatching a plot!

Imagine if they came in and stole my ham! I can hear the packet opening from a mile away.
You can keep the spaghetti and the Budweiser, though, as they didn't taste nice anyway.

At least I'm not eating shoes or gloves any more and would rather have a dental stick.
It's a good job I can get it myself from the cupboard. It's an impressive little trick!

But then you know that I catch on fast and am quick to learn new things to show you.
Remember when Niamh taught me all I know and all she had to do was feed me?

A bag of treats will always ensure that I obey each and every command that you'd like me to do.
The only thing I might not want is to stay in my pen but that's just because I'd rather be with you.

My Dad tried his best to keep me in it but I always found a way to get out.
It was meant as a compliment really as Fran is the one I can't bear to be without.

I love that you share your garden with me and I enjoy digging and sniffing for bones.
I always have a dirty nose from burying loot and obsessing over stones.

My favourite toy is a dinosaur and the soft blanket I stole from Lauren is my best.
You know what I like and always get it for me and in pink fur have me dressed.

Except, of course, when I go to the beach and my jet black coat glistens and is free.
I adore being near water and love every river, paddling pool and stream.

I also like snuggling in front of the fire with you and being swaddled in my throw.
Francis even lets me sneak up on the sofa beside him but that's a secret you all know.

Lauren takes me to her bed for a hug after she's been out on a Saturday night.
I stay close beside her and look after her well and am there to keep her right.

All down the years I have been there for Niamh and am an antidote to her pain.
I have soothed and comforted and consoled her when her mood has been on the wane.

I miss Darren as he's in the land 'down under' now but I like it when he comes back.
The treats were flying on his last visit home and I was never short of a snack.

I know when any of you need a cuddle or a 'pick me up' of the slobbery and furry kind.
I may only be a four legged animal but I am medicine for body, soul and mind.

For fifteen years I have been by your sides and was delighted with my last birthday cake.
It was made from coconut and all sorts of tasty things and I know that from love it was made.

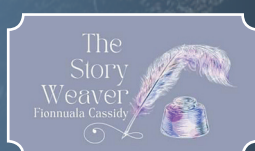
Thank you for making me part of your family and counting me as one of the clan.
I'm so glad to be looked upon as another child along with Niamh, Lauren and Darren.

It really is true when they say that man's best friend is a dog as they are loving and loyal and true.
And out of all the owners I could have had I'm so glad I've got to share my life with you.

Every doggy only has one master and I worship you one and all.
But Fran is the man that leads my pack and I always answer his call.

Julie, I hope you enjoy your birthday and that my adoration makes the perfect gift.
I'll lie across your knee or find a spot by your feet that's the perfect place to sit.

I love you with everything I have and hope you will carry my paw prints on your heart as proof.
That forever more and until the end of time I will always be your one and only . . .



By Fionnuala Cassidy