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## Mums take the cake from first bite

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**Two debut novels, two tales told from different ends of the social spectrum. On the one hand there's the story of "inner-city twentysomethings trying to get their shit together" and on the other of the goings-on in a Brisbane mothers' coffee group. One of the authors is a hip, award-winning poet and zine/comic publisher, the other is a Brisbane mum.**

Why is one so much better than the other? Because Louise Limerick's *Dying for Cake* is honest, original, thoughtful, emotional, mature and suspenseful, while Adam Ford's *Man Bites Dog* is as gripping as two-year-old Blu-Tac.

Ford wades sluggishly through an area that young Sydney writer Marcus Zusak has already swept through with tenderness, polish, grown-up humour and aplomb. It is possibly no coincidence that the dog motif on the cover echoes an early Zusak novel, *The Underdog*.

*Man Bites Dog* is about a recent university graduate called Steven who starts work as a postman. His life consists of going to poetry readings in pubs, getting drunk and drawing comic strips for his friend's zine. On his round, a postman-hating dog dies and he is blamed.

A more skilful touch would have made comedy of Steven's quest to clear himself, but the novel plods to a nadir without offering anything in the way of new ideas, wider themes or writing that extends beyond the intellectually smug and banal. For instance: "The only thing I am sure of is that this little scenario is doing a real number on my head."

Whereas Louise Limerick, in *Dying for Cake*, comes up with such gems as "Nothing is as good as tea made with tank-water, it's as soft as sunrise."

One is putting words on paper, the other is writing.

Is it any surprise, then, that having picked up *Dying for Cake* with a heavy heart ("Chick lit! Chick lit!" went the radar), it was almost impossible to put down? Five "ordinary" women, one recently taken to a mental hospital after her newborn baby went missing, lives entwined, guilty secrets gradually revealed ... the layers are peeled back with an assuredness that makes you think Limerick's next book will be even better.

We meet Joanna (craving for cake), Susan (craving for independence), Clare (craving to paint again), Wendy (consumed by guilt) and poor, mad Evelyn, to whose inner ravings we are privy and who refuses to reveal what she did with her baby.

Never again will you walk past a group of mums having coffee and cake without dying to know what's going on beneath the surface. However, you will still be able to walk past your postman without a second glance. ■

### Man Bites Dog

By Adam Ford  
Allen & Unwin,  
240 pp, \$19.95

### Dying for Cake

By Louise Limerick  
Pan, 336 pp, \$22

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