

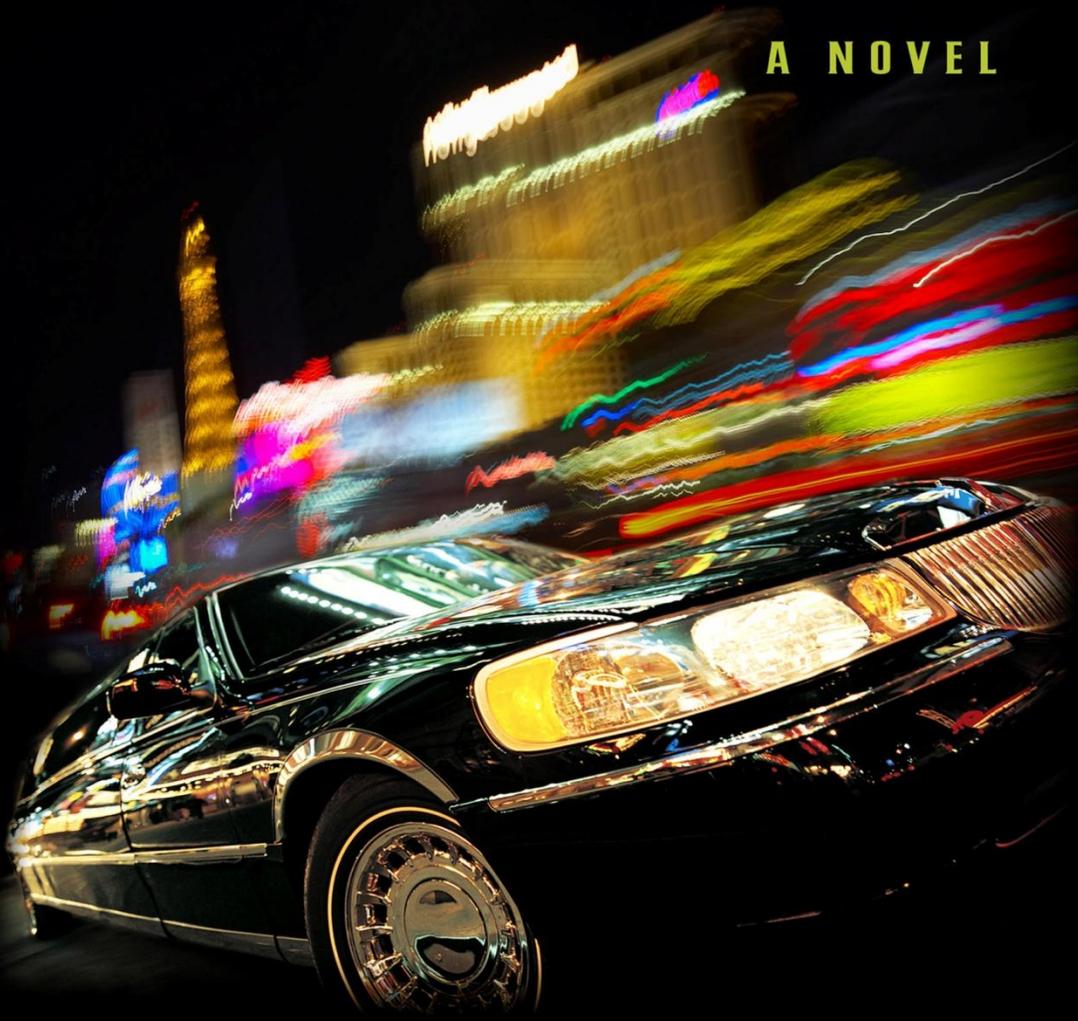


AN XZBT EXCLUSIVE

**LANCE HAWVERMALE**

THE  
**Discretionist**

**A NOVEL**



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## About *The Discretionist*

Limousine driver Micah Donovan prides himself on his discretion. Regardless of what transpires in the back of his car every night, he keeps his eyes on the road and his heart so far away that he can no longer reach it.

But something's different tonight in Las Vegas. The driver's wealthy client, Austin Savlodar, is the malicious son of an imprisoned gangster. During their journey through the neon streets, Micah overhears Savlodar forcing himself upon a woman in the back of the car. Reminding himself that it's none of his business, Micah delivers them to their destination.

Savlodar phones again a few hours later, requesting another young beauty be delivered to his door. She introduces herself as Katelyn. This time, Micah is unable to turn a deaf ear, and he rescues Katelyn just before Savlodar can hurt her. Together they flee into the night, with Savlodar's enforcer pursuing them.

Micah's carefully crafted life, so far free of impediment and incident, breaks apart in his hands. He has only Katelyn to keep him standing -- a woman he hardly knows yet is unable to resist. The two of them have little choice but to run to stay alive. All the while, Katelyn gradually teaches Micah to waltz. Dancing becomes their talisman, keeping them together when everything disintegrates around them...

## Praise for *The Discretionist*

*"Hawvermale, balancing suspense with character study, includes enough pauses between the adrenaline-pumping scenes to give his leads the time they need to grow."*

- Kirkus Reviews

## **Other books by Lance Hawvermale**

The Tongue Merchant  
Seeing Pink



## Chapter 1

“No matter what happens in the next few minutes, don’t turn around.”

The driver nodded and kept his eyes on the glittering street beyond the windshield because when a client wanted discretion you had, sensibly, two options: shut up and take the money, or shut up and take the money.

“This submarine of yours have one of those partition thingies?”

The driver didn’t bother to nod this time—*partition thingy?*—just extended a hand and touched a finger to the magic button. With a gentle hum, the blackened glass rose ghostlike behind him, closing off his world from the sweaty Shangri-la the client was about to create in the back.

He waited.

No one waited like the driver. Other chauffeurs gathered in the casino parking garages for gossip, caffeine, text messaging, and—invariably—smoking. In the strata of Las Vegas social groups, theirs was an archaeological history of shooting the breeze while their betters wiggled martinis at one another and hid behind their sunglasses at Texas Hold ‘Em tables, preening like miniature gods. But the driver needed no cigarettes and even less camaraderie from those who understood the trade. Alone, his thoughts walked the steps of his imagination, and what he found at the path’s end was always himself.

The door opened. Closed.

The driver felt the car's weight dip gently. He knew the vehicle intimately, like a captain with the first and only ship of his command, and judging by the minimal shift, he guessed the new passenger to be no more than a hundred and fifty pounds, give or take. And so the limousine welcomed aboard another actor, though the driver didn't care whether they knew their lines or not. All that mattered other than the sun rising tomorrow and his shoes staying shined was the client's fifty-one dollars an hour, plus tax.

## Chapter 2

Later he let them out a block from where their wives were feeding slot machines.

When he opened the door for them, he caught his own reflection in the polarized glass. The cascade of colored lights here on Karen Avenue subtly transformed him. His skin was the kind of black that was neither so dark as to make his client uncomfortable nor so light that the man didn't look at him like he was a servant when he climbed out the car and said, "Nice tux."

"Thank you, sir." The driver had never worn a simple chauffeur's uniform.

The client hefted an uncertain smile to his face as another man followed him out, slightly ruffled. "I appreciate your circumspection this evening. By that I mean—"

"I know the meaning of the word, sir."

"Oh . . . yes, of course." The man tried to keep his smile in place. A hairline of sweat lingered on his upper lip. "Then I'm also sure you accept the good, old, devalued American dollar in lieu of a credit card." He palmed something from an inner suit pocket and offered his hand.

The driver, as he had done so many times before, shook.

"And if I should require your boundless prudence again in the future?"

Now it was the driver's turn to delve into his pocket. His tuxedo jacket wasn't custom-made but had at least been tailored so as not to give away its off-the-rack ancestry. From within it he retrieved a card.

## ONE COOL GENTLEMAN LIMOUSINE SERVICE

The client accepted the card. "Very well, then."

With that, the two men struck off down the glaring Vegas sidewalk, veering apart from each other as they approached the Sahara.

The driver didn't even watch them go.

He closed the rear door without bothering to check on the aftermath, the spilled Courvoisier, the condoms in the tiny waste bin, the insistent scent. In the two years that he'd been the owner and sole operator of One Cool Gentleman, he'd shuttled senators, high-rollers, low-rollers on a weekend lucky streak, convention-goers, a handful of celebrities, mafiosi, honeymooners, and pricey prostitutes en route to or from the job. They could all be read, their lives examined and revealed by the flotsam they left behind. But they'd purchased from the driver more than just a ride; they also bought a few blessed miles of anonymity. And they remembered as much when they signed for the tip.

The driver slipped behind the wheel. The dashboard clock read 11:17 P.M.

Feeding time in the city had begun, and the animals waited.

## Chapter 3

At midnight the women started singing.

Somewhere in heaven, the driver knew, Whitney Houston was scratching at a sudden rash. The five bachelorettes had reached the chorus of "I Wanna Dance with Somebody," the only part of the song they managed without breaking into giggles and partially drunken words their mothers hadn't taught them. Because they'd insisted he didn't raise the privacy divider—the better to pester you with, my dear—he played out his prisoner's role of captive audience of one. At least they smelled nice.

He guided the car into a gentle turn.

The singing had, at least, trimmed off the conversation they'd been having about someone named Derek and the God-if-only-he-could-touch-me things *they* would say to him if they were that lucky bitch Laretta. And other tidbits: Jessica's new boyfriend, a promotion at work, the economy, open-toed pumps. They said *boobs* a lot.

The driver slowed, edging toward the curb.

*"... with somebody who loves me!"*

They broke into a cheer in which the driver detected a few ounces of sadness. He didn't intend to make note of the occasional strain in their voices, their unspoken sense that this marriage might change things between them. But his radar sometimes swept the local skies before he could turn it off. Thankfully it was time to shift into park and get out.

He held their door open. How many times had he performed this particular action in the previous twenty-three months? How many times had he reached for a hand to help a lady plant her narrow heel safely on terra firma?

The first one smiled at him a little bashfully. She was probably the one he'd heard whispering about him being kinda cute. The next one wore a cocktail dress that was likely worth at least two payments on the limo. Two of them were white, two were black, and damned if the last wasn't Hispanic, a perfectly divided demographic right here on the sidewalk in front of the MGM Grand.

The tallest and least inebriated of them gave him a little wave. "Thank you so much."

"My pleasure, ma'am."

"Oh, you don't have to call her ma'am," another one said. "That kind of chivalrous nonsense goes straight to her bleach-blond head."

"And tequila goes straight to yours, Shondra," her friend returned.

Shondra pinched the corner of the driver's tie and gazed up at him. "I don't suppose you have time for a little nightcap? Sort of take the edge off . . ." She gave his tie a tug. "Hey, this isn't even a clip-on. I'm impressed."

Offering her a prefabricated smile, he carefully removed her hand before she could storm the Bastille of his bowtie. "I'm honored by the invite, but I'm on the clock."

“Sure, honey. Your loss.”

Thankfully they’d paid in advance, because suddenly they drifted away, one of them removing her shoes as they went.

The driver checked himself in the glass. Women had this thing about touching a man’s tie. He hadn’t worn a ready-tied variety since that night a year ago when the sorority girl had reached for him with the quickness of a lioness and tried to untie it. When she realized the bow was pre-made and fastened around his collar by a strap, she’d laughed a mere foot from his face, while her embarrassed friends tried to lead her away.

Satisfied that all was well, he got back in the car and went to meet his one true love.

## Love it?

Read the rest of the book to find out what happens next.

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Lance published his first two novels under the pseudonym of Erin O'Rourke. He released his third novel, a murder mystery titled *The Tongue Merchant*, under his own name. His fiction and poetry have won over twenty awards. He is an alumnus of AmeriCorps and continues to believe in the power of giving. Currently an Assistant Professor of English at Ranger College in Texas, USA, Lance teaches film, poetry, and creative writing courses. He lives in Texas with his wife Lindsey and their four cats.

