

She Does Good Hair

The Hair
mavens
Book One

“Wonderfully funny and tenderly poignant . . .”

CATHY GOHLKE, Christy award winning author of
Band of Sisters and Promise Me This



A novel by Terri Gillespie

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The Hair Mavens—Book One
She Does Good Hair
By Terri Gillespie
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Chapter One

Wrapped in the warmth of affection and admiration, Shira Goldstein exited her Beverly Hills salon into the perfectly beautiful sunny day. She turned and blew kisses toward her clients who had pressed their hands against the salon window like children in a candy store and she their Willy Wonka of beauty.

With practiced grace, she slid her sunglasses on as she looked down Rodeo Drive. There. Her transportation waited for her at the curb.

From the black stretch limousine, a handsome driver exited, wearing a black tux and crisp white shirt, which matched his perfectly whitened teeth and olive complexion. Like a performer from *Dancing with the Stars* he salsa-ed her to the back limo door and opened it.

“Thank you,” Shira purred.

The driver winked and said in a squeaky feminine voice, “Shira, I’m dripping.”

Shira blinked. The handsome driver dissolved into the back of Mrs. Phillips’s sappy wet head.

The warmth of embarrassment wrapped itself around Shira’s face.

“Shira, I said I’m dripping.” Mrs. Phillips wrestled with her mop of hair. Her nasal, East Coast accent confirmed that Shira’s fantasy didn’t match reality. Plus, she had broken *Élégance Salon and Spa*’s number one rule: Keep the client happy and *dry*.

Were Mrs. Phillips’s forehead not recently Botoxed it would be creased with irritation.

Shira gulped. “I’m so sorry.” *Stop the daydreaming already. You’re not in Beverly Hills. Yet.*

Shira repositioned the thick black towel at the nape of her wealthiest client’s neck and gently massaged. A little trick she’d learned to help patrons return to their happy place when interruptions like this occurred.

A quick glance at the mirror confirmed that Mrs. Phillips was in the zone. Her eyes were closed and her head lolled freely with each knead of Shira’s experienced hands.

Her client moaned in pleasure.

Shira chewed her bottom lip. She’d waited five years for this moment. More than a month ago, over lattes and oatmeal maple scones, her boss Veronica Harrington had shared the news of finalizing her plans to open another salon in Beverly Hills. Obviously, her boss and mentor had honored Shira with a higher level of trust to share this insider information. The rest of the Manhattan staff had only learned about it a week before.

Back then Veronica had all but promised that Shira would be the manager of the newest Élégance Salon and Spa.

Still, she had invited any of the staff to apply for the position. No one else had dared to apply for the position except—

Nigel.

As if reading her mind, Nigel flounced past her. His ability for annoyance was only matched by his sneakiness—like some well-dressed mosquito taking dives at her, sucking every drop of her confidence. He walked toward the shampoo area and pointed a bejeweled finger at the shampoo girls. A chorus of them harmonized, “Oh, Nigel!”

Everyone loved Nigel. Maybe Shira would have liked him more if they weren’t competing for the same job and she didn’t have to constantly clean up after his mistakes. Although he was a genius at the “Mac-Daddy” blow-dry.

No offense to Nigel, but she’d given the past five years of her life to Élégance, and he had only arrived nine months ago. Veronica couldn’t possibly give the job to him.

Nigel knocked on Veronica’s office door then went back to *kibitzing* with the girls. Veronica’s door opened. Like a high-fashion jack-in-the-box, her upper torso appeared, followed by a willowy hand that motioned to him. Nigel rolled his neck, straightened his tie then strutted into Veronica’s inner sanctum.

What did this mean? She wanted to see *him* first? Shira swallowed a disappointed whimper. Veronica caught her pout. She grinned and winked conspiringly. Muscles uncoiling, Shira returned her focus to the nearly comatose Mrs. Phillips in her chair.

She fingered the strands on top of her client’s head. Yes, her triple foil job was flawless. The perfect balance of butterscotch-blonde and Monroe-platinum highlights with chocolate-brown lowlights had created follicle drama. Better than natural.

Shira pulled a small key ring from the front pocket of her cream bolero jacket. She unlocked her station’s drawer and returned the key. Inside the gold felt-lined drawer were her Kamisori shears—lined up by size—like a surgeon’s tray. She chose the correct instrument for this cut, inserted her fingers into the brightly-colored handle, and became one with the scissors. The pleasant-sounding snips of her favorite tool effortlessly shaped and trimmed a chic masterpiece.

The time flew as quickly as her fingers. It wasn’t until she had walked Mrs. Phillips—expertly coiffed with color-dimension the envy of every stylist—out the door and locked it for the night, that Shira realized Nigel was still in Veronica’s office.

She patted her gurgling stomach then checked herself once more in the mirror. Despite another ten-hour shift, her Crisis104 suit didn’t seem the worse for wear. She buttoned the jacket and smoothed a palm over the matching skinny pants. Very Audrey Hepburn. Classically feminine yet professional—Veronica’s mantra.

It was nearly eight o’clock, and New York’s premium salon still buzzed with activity. Everyone from the cleaning staff to stylists had hung around for the official word. Who would earn the coveted promotion to the Beverly Hills salon? Who would get to rub bony shoulders with stars and other famous in-the-knows?

Shira sipped a mocha-mint latte, which had long gone cold. Still, it gave her shaking hands something to do. She probably should have eaten today, but her stomach had knotted like a chignon since before the sun peeked through the tall buildings around her apartment.

“Quit pretending you’re nervous.” Fawna, one of the shampoo girls—and her best friend—punched her arm and walked away.

“Ow.” Shira rubbed the throbbing “love-pat” and studied Fawna’s long blonde hair with mega-shimmering highlights swishing from side to side—another testimony of Shira’s color-genius. Fawna looked over her shoulder. “You know you got the job, Goldstein!”

Although others had whispered this to her throughout the day, Shira still wondered why Veronica would even consider Nigel. Not only could he not manage his way out of a Gucci bag, but he’d only graduated from the London Hair Academy nine months ago. Nigel still left all the paperwork for Shira to do. Yesterday she’d actually seen him scribble some guy’s phone number on the color inventory sheet then tuck it into his suit pocket, where she’d later rescued it. Imagine running out of Chestnut Brown or Edge of Night Black? There’d be chaos on the streets of Manhattan.

A giggle bubbled to the surface and turned into a snort. Several people glanced her way. She covered her mouth and faked a cough. She turned toward her station and—oh, great—spotted another silver strand taunting her. Yes, like her father, she was prematurely going gray. Sam Goldstein hadn’t given her anything in years. Except his curse that kept giving.

Did he even care that she was one of New York’s top, award-winning stylists and on speed dial for all sorts of East Coast celebrities? Hah. Despite his prediction that she’d never amount to anything without a degree, she was one step closer to her five-year plan of opening her own chain of salons. Two years of managing the California salon, and investors would line up to sow their money into a sure thing.

What is taking Veronica so long?

She plopped onto her leather styling chair. If there were any chance God would listen to her, she’d actually pray right now. Thoughts of Aunt Edna back in Pennsylvania praying for her produced a wisp of gratitude that swirled around her heart, warming it. God would surely listen to her aunt. She was a saint—if Jews had saints.

Nice to know she had a few people who cared. Veronica, Fawna, Aunt Edna, and, of course, Alec. She wiggled her naked ring finger. Surely this promotion would finally motivate Alec to say the magic words.

Stop it, Shira. You just pumped up the nervous volume.

Shira jumped out of the chair and tried to walk out the panicky energy. Aunt Edna would say she had a bad case of *schpilkis*. Her heels clicked on the marble floor as she paced toward the front of the salon. The floor-to-ceiling windows framed the city lights and the busy foot and street traffic like a travel poster for the powerful and influential. She would miss the rhythm and excitement that was New York, but it was time to move on.

Turning around, she admired the salon that had given her the opportunity to hone her craft. Two floors of artistes who beautified women—and men—from head to toe. Rows of styling stations that seemed to float on a cloud of wealth and power. She took a to-her-toes breath of the marvelous bouquet of earthy pine, sweet floral, and fruity citrus around her. The best aromatherapy in the world. It reminded her that salon life had always been in her blood.

Shira rubbed the smooth paper coffee cup against her cheek.

Growing up, her aunt’s small-town beauty shop was more fun than Disney World—not that she’d ever been to Disney World. Shira had never wanted to be anything but a beautician—a hairdresser. No, all of those in the beauty trade preferred to be called stylists. Beautician was too reminiscent of mortician. Shira shivered.

After begging for months, her aunt had suddenly given in and let her shampoo old Mrs. . . . She couldn’t remember the brave white-haired lady’s name. Shira smiled. Only eight years old

and she thought she was all that. Standing on a rickety metal stool, Shira got as much water and shampoo on the poor woman's clothes and floor as she did her hair.

That was right before Crisis One when—

Muffled laughter erupted from Veronica's office. Like a red-hot curling iron it seared Shira's already twisted insides. The door opened to Veronica's melodic scales and Nigel's loud theatrical staccato. The schpilkis hit a new level.

Something cold and wet ran down her pant leg. In her tightened fist was the crushed paper cup. She glanced down. The sticky contents had produced an ugly brown stain—like a caffeinated oil spill—down her cream slacks. Her eyes traveled up to see Veronica and Nigel in front of her.

“Shira, love, have an accident?” Nigel brought his fingertips to his mouth and shook his bulbous head, barely stifling a giggle.

She ran back to her station to grab some tissues. With quick frantic strokes she tried cleaning her pants. Instead she left a trail of tissue dandruff. Veronica came up behind her and handed her a towel.

“New suit?”

Their eyes met. Shira hoped to read sympathy in the smoky gray, but something more like amusement sparkled.

“Yes.” Try as she might, Shira couldn't stop her lips from quivering. Her Crisis104 pantsuit—the Dad-Forgot-My-Birthday-Again outfit—looked the way she felt. Ruined.

Nigel snickered. His response revived her annoyance. She mustered up an angry glare then shot it in his direction.

“Don't get your knickers in a twist, girlfriend.” He tugged on a cuff and adjusted the lapel of his Ralph Lauren suit. “Veronica, love, meet you at Savoy?”

What?

Shira turned toward the woman she had trusted with her future. Veronica glanced down at her gold alligator-skin flats. Her friend's pale cheeks colored.

Oh, the betrayal. Shira had helped Veronica pick out those shoes.

“Yes, Nigel,” Veronica nodded toward him. “Run along.”

He pranced through the salon lifting his arms and pointing to his head. “I got Beverly Hills,” he bellowed.

Someone let out a moan. Shira realized it had come from her. Her heart pounded against her chest, wanting out of her body. To run somewhere safe.

A crowd formed around Nigel. The shampoo staff took turns hugging him. Squeals and laughter fell like verbal balloons and confetti. Shira watched as her best friend Fawna looped her arm through his and planted a kiss . . . *on his lips?*

Shira blinked. The scene before her turned soft and fuzzy. Everyone seemed to move in slow motion.

Was this a dream?

“Shira?”

Was someone calling her?

Veronica's face moved into Shira's view. “Dear?” Veronica wrapped her thin arms around Shira and tried to guide her away from the celebration.

Except Shira's legs had turned to rubber and all she could hear was a strange ringing in her ears. She glanced back toward the swarm of well-wishers.

As if on cue, they stopped talking and stared at Shira. Everything went dark—

“You fainted?” Alec’s booming voice pulsed through Shira’s head.

She held the phone away from her ear. “Yes, Alec. Could you please reduce the decibels? You know what happens when my blood sugar gets too low.” She massaged her temple preparing for the next blast. “Then I quit.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Thanks for your support, Alec.” Shira stomped across the living room’s hardwood floor toward the shopping bag containing Crisis12’s booby prize. Like a junkie needing a fix, she reached into the Saks Fifth Avenue bag and pulled the Chanel sweater from the tissue wrapping. She rubbed the pink cashmere against her cheek. Soft as a Phyto hair conditioning.

Feeling better now.

In the words of Coco Chanel: “A girl should be two things: classy and fabulous.” What could be more fab than this sweater?

“What did you buy for this disaster?”

She shoved the sweater behind her back. “What makes you think I bought anything?” Her face heated. What was she doing? Alec couldn’t see her.

He cleared his throat.

She brought the sweater back around and held it up. “It’s beautiful, Alec. The yummiest pink pullover with—”

A familiar tuneless hum came from his end. Alec was bored with her, had tuned her out, and was at this moment—most likely—admiring himself in a mirror.

Alec Hudson knew he was gorgeous. How many times had women thrown themselves at him, when Shira stood right next to him?

“So Nigel got the job,” he said.

The modicum of peace from her purchase evaporated. Was it only a few hours ago she had admired herself in the mirror at Saks? The lusciousness of the sweater had helped her overlook the stains on her pants—and her life. She had imagined showing off the fabulousness to Alec and how the pink brought out her brown eyes.

A burning in her nasal passages meant tears wouldn’t be far behind. She pinched the blemished area of her pants. All she could imagine now was how spoiled her life was. *Nigel got the job.*

“Yes.” She hugged the sweater, trying to soak in its perfection as she walked toward the window, the floors creaking with each step like a mournful “no, no.” The costly cashmere therapy no longer brought comfort. Surely this meant the crisis had altered the space-time continuum. She peeked through the blinds at the busy street.

No. Life went on, despite hers ending.

Her sigh frosted the glass. The city scene blurred as pools formed in her eyes.

“Did Veronica give you a reason?”

Shira moved to the couch, the cloud of pink safe again on the coffee table. “She said his ‘profile’ was a more suitable demographic for Beverly Hills.” She lay down and rested an arm over her eyes. The tears finally released and streamed into her ears.

“What the heck is that supposed to mean?”

“He’s British, a London Hair Academy graduate, and gay.” She sniffed. “I’m domestic and dull. He’s imported and intriguing.”

“And he’s a college graduate, right?”

Shira winced. “Yes.” Nigel had completed *his* business degree. Now she had her father’s voice buzzing in her head. *You’ll never amount to anything without a degree . . .*

“So you really quit.” Alec puffed out a breath. “Think that was a wise thing to do?”

Another stream rolled into her ear.

No, but I was humiliated in front of the whole salon. Doesn’t anyone care about that?

She wiped the tracks of disappointment with the back of her hand. Like a bad soap opera the whole sordid thing replayed in her head.

Fawna’s face in the crowd of people standing over her.

Fawna walking away, texting. Why didn’t her best friend help her? Call her? Shira’s lips trembled.

“You know what, babe? It’s gonna be okay,” Alec said. “Because Veronica is gonna beg you to come back.”

“Think so?” Shira’s voice sounded small, almost childlike. She sniffed and chewed on her fingernail.

“Of course I do!” He snorted. “She can’t run that salon without you. You know as much about the business as she does.”

Veronica did say that too. That she depended on Shira. Right now she was needed in New York.

“She’ll probably give you a bonus to come back. You’ll see.”

“She was pretty angry when I left.” Shira pushed herself up to a sitting position. This felt good, Alec coming to her defense.

“Come on. Your clients will stampede her office. All those designer shoes at her door and she’ll do anything you want.”

She imagined Mrs. Phillips leading a mob of women stomping their Louis Vuitton heels and demanding Veronica get her back. A giggle dribbled from her.

“That’s my girl.”

How did he do it? She could take on the world now. Except that there were no tissues around. She rubbed her nose on her silk blouse sleeve.

Good thing Alec wasn’t there. And good thing the sweater was out of harm’s way.

“Babe, we’ll just put our plans for California on hold for awhile.”

Their plans. Shira stared at her ring-less ring finger.

“The audition for the play went good. I probably got the part,” he said.

“That’s great, Alec!”

She stood and stretched. Alec’s recent birthday gift drew her toward the fireplace like fresh-baked brownies. She leaned on the mantle and ogled the expensively framed photo of him. A small spotlight was positioned above. She clicked the light and –taa-daa. Instant marquee.

“When will you know something?” Shira traced the outline of his lips and gazed at his ice-blue eyes before stepping away.

“Arnie says the director loves me, so any day, I’m sure.”

“It’s about time your agent worked up a little sweat on your behalf.” A gurgle came from Shira’s stomach. She walked toward the kitchen.

“So what about heading to the Savoy for a late dinner?” he said.

Shira skidded to a stop. “No!” The last people she wanted to see were Veronica and Nigel—not yet, anyway. “Um, let’s try a new place.”

“Sure, babe. You wanna call Fawna to see if she’ll meet us?”

You mean stabbed-me-in-the-back-Fawna? “No. I prefer to have you all to myself this time, Alec.”

He paused.

Apprehension landed on her shoulders like an old smelly blanket. She cringed. *Don't ask. Don't ask. Don't—*

“Babe, the underwear commercial shoots tomorrow, so can you, uh, you know, spot me for tonight?”

“Yeah. Sure. Whatever.” So he was a little short right now. With the commercials and the play, he'd be discovered soon. And, who knows, he might soon support *her* as Hollywood's newest heartthrob.

He sniffed. “You're the greatest. Pick you up in an hour?”

“I'll be ready.” She ended the call, retrieved the sweater, and sprinted back to her bedroom. Possible outfits rolled in her head like a slot machine in Atlantic City.

By the time Alec was due to arrive, Shira's bed and floor resembled the aftermath of a Loehmann's sale. But she didn't care. The perfect outfit had risen from the heaps. She examined her reflection in the full-length mirror. She hadn't starved herself enough to get into a size two, but a four was no elephant. The pink sweater and the new blonde highlights she had added last week brightened her chocolate-brown eyes. She dabbed a layer of gloss on her full lips and blew herself a kiss. She was ready to par-tay.

Call Aunt Edna.

Shira turned around, expecting to see someone. Where did that come from?

Aunt Edna? That was the last thing she needed. Drawn back into the clutches of small-town America? She didn't think so.

Still, a cup of Aunt Edna's hot cocoa sounded pretty good. With mini-marshmallows. Some sympathy? A hug?

But it wouldn't only be a cup of cocoa or hugs. It would come with strings, like sermons, God-agendas, and good old-fashioned Jewish guilt.

She could imagine her aunt's perpetual effervescent voice saying, “Shira, come work in my salon.”

Doing granny hair? She wasn't *that* desperate.

The buzzer rang. She jogged to the security system by the front door and pressed the intercom button. “Yes?”

“Hey, babe. I'm here.”

Her Prince Charming had arrived.

“I'll be right down.” She grabbed her leather jacket off the hook, then her new Chloe bag and keys.

The phone rang.

Shira's heart did a flip-flop. Maybe it was Veronica. She rummaged through her bag and grabbed her cell.

Aunt Edna's smiling face appeared on the screen. Aunt Edna?

The theme from the *Twilight Zone* played in her head as she walked back to the door.

She sent the call directly to voicemail. A barb of anxiety pricked her conscience. She stopped, her hand on the cold metal knob. Was Alec right? Would Veronica eventually call?

Shira shrugged, then chuckled as she opened the door. Of course she would call. As Alec said, Veronica needed her.

If he were wrong, Shira would *have* to do granny hair.

Once again the room spun around Shira like a vortex. Only this time the sensation was self-inflicted. She stumbled toward her living room and hit her shin on the end table.

Why hadn't she stuck with her usual glass of sweet Moscato? Why? Because Alec called her a peasant and made her drink some concoction one of his bartender friends had dreamed up.

Alec. The *schlub* had abandoned her for some of his actor friends. *Catch you later, babe.* Humph. She bought him dinner, picked up his bar tab and what did she get?

A belch sent shock waves around the living room. Shira's hands flew to her mouth.

"Was that *me*?" Her question was punctuated with a hiccup.

She kicked off her heels and shook out of her jacket as she swayed toward the bathroom. Her phone clunked to the floor. The message light flashed. Veronica.

The music was so loud at the bar she must have missed her call. A new intoxication, one of excitement now energized her.

"She's not angry with me after all. Thank you. Thank you." She tapped the screen to get to the list of last calls. "Alec, you handsome man, you were right." The list of recent calls names appeared. "I forgive you for being a jerk and—"

Only Aunt Edna's name. Some older calls. No Veronica. No job. No—

Oh.

Shira grasped her stomach and bent forward.

Not only was the room spinning but now she felt like she was riding in the backseat of a rollercoaster. Her hands covered her mouth. No—

Minutes later, Shira sat on the cold tile floor, her head resting on the toilet seat. The song of regret played in her head. She heard its pounding tune too often these days. It wasn't just tonight's episode; it seemed her whole life was out of control. The more she tried to manage her life, the more it seemed to tangle.

Why did this keep happening to her? She pulled herself up and rinsed her mouth at the sink, avoiding her reflection in the mirror. How was she going to get out of this mess?

Entering her bedroom, she walked over the piles of clothes she'd left earlier and stood before the mirrored closet doors. The image before her didn't look like a fabulous and classy career woman. She looked pathetic.

She needed a hug.

A *hug*. Shira slid open the closet and dropped to her knees. Somewhere, buried in the back was a large white box Aunt Edna had mailed her last year for Hanukkah. Her aunt had called it a long-distance hug.

There it was. She felt a surge of urgency as she lifted the lid. Fingers pawed through the crisp blue tissue paper. A fuzzy white robe with matching fuzzy slippers. Probably from Walmart, but she didn't care.

Shedding her designer clothes, she slipped the soft cotton onto her body and cinched it loosely around her waist, then thrust her feet into pillowy softness. All she needed was a box of chocolates, a couple hours of soaps, and she'd be fine.

A contented sigh pushed through her once tensed body. She scuffed her way into the kitchen and tugged open the refrigerator door, the condiments rattling, "Will you ever cook again?" and looked inside. She passed the take-out graveyard to grab an Evian. She twisted the cap as she shut the fridge door with her fluffy backside.

Maybe she should listen to her aunt's message? No. It was probably her annual Rosh Hashanah guilt call anyway. *I'll make brisket and pineapple kugel.* As if.

But her stomach called out, *yes, feed me brisket and kugel.*

She pointed to her abdomen. “Traitor.”

No, she wasn’t up for the family shame game this year. Especially now that she was officially a failure and everything that her father had predicted. Who knew where she would be in a few weeks? One thing for sure, it wasn’t back in Philly.

She didn’t care how beautiful fall was in the little town of Gladstone. She wasn’t coming back. Not for brisket, not for kugel, not for a heaping serving of guilt with a side of regret.

She sipped and turned off lights as she shuffled to her bedroom. On her dresser was the worn leather journal. It was time to log in today’s crisis. The discolored pages almost moved by themselves to the last crisis. Crisis 111—*car splashed mud on new shoes and purse.* Shira turned her ankle to better inspect the gold ankle bracelet from Macy’s. Fitting payback.

After logging Crisis 112 and the booby-prize—the sweater—she paged through the old book. Even the journal was in response to a crisis.

Crisis One.

The familiar gate to Shira’s heart clanged shut. She slammed the book closed and threw it on the dresser. It slid to the floor, landing upside down, its pages twisted like her heart. She quickly picked up the book, and something floated to the floor.

A photo. Shira dropped to the floor.

Mom.

The picture was taken before her mother’s last round of chemo, almost thirteen years ago. Dad snapped it when Shira and her mother had shared a happy moment—back when they were a family. She lovingly held the photo and traced her mother’s face with her finger.

Their hair blew together into one happy twist of brown. Their foreheads touching, their laughter caught forever. She was twelve.

Shira cinched her hug a little tighter.

She’d call Aunt Edna in the morning.

Thanks for taking a peek at the first chapter of the first book in *The Hair Mavens Trilogy*.

What did you think? Shira probably isn't the most likeable soul you've ever met, but don't be fooled by that prickly exterior.

Wait until you meet the rest of the ladies at the Hair Mavens salon. What a tangled mess they'll make!

I guarantee you'll love these ladies! And this is only the beginning! Wait until you read the rest of the books. Which I hope you will.

Thanks again!

God Blessing and keep reading!

Terri Gillespie