

TELEVISION REVIEW

CBS Tuesday Movie

GRAVE SECRETS: THE LEGACY OF HILLTOP DRIVE

(Tues. 5), 9-11 p.m., CBS)

Filed on location around L.A. by Freyda Rothstein Prods. in association with Hearst Entertainment. Exec producer, Freyda Rothstein; supervising producer-writer, Gregory Goodell; based on non-fiction book "The Black Hope Horror" by Ben & Jean Williams, John Bruce Shoemaker; director, John Patterson; camera, Shelly Johnson; editor, Edward Abrams; sound, Jacob Goldstein; music, Patrick Williams; production designer, Roy Alan Amaral.

Cast: Patty Duke, David Selby, Kiersten Warren, Blake Clark, Kelly Rowan, Jonelle Allen, Dakin Mathews, Jon Maynard Pennell, Terry Davis, Kimberly Cullum, David Soul, Maggie Roswell, Rick Fitts, James Lashly, Frances Bay, George Solomon, Jay Brooks, Julius Harris, Jill Andre, James Gallery, Jim Raymond, Don Fischer, Roger Scott, Dennis Hayden, Muriel Minot, Doug Stevenson, David Hayman, Teresa Lee, Bradley Altman.

Yet another tale of a family living in a haunted house surfaces, but this one has a twist: The house is new, the land the house stands on is haunted—and it's based on a true story. It makes a difference in the mildly chilling excursion into eeriness and how one average family copes.

Telefilm, beginning with Jean and Ben (Shag) Williams' move into the new house in a tract atop Hilltop Drive, leans toward character study, with the hackneyed angles soft-pedaled. The chief fright ingredient is anticipation.

No one's told the Williamses or their neighbors that the homes rest on a forgotten cemetery. That, too, makes a difference.

Scripter Gregory Goodell, wisely toning down the book's credulity stretch, builds the family unit.

One of the Williamses' two daughters (Kiersten Warren) is the first to be affected by the place's aura, but marries and moves out; Carli (Kimberly Cullum), the child of their other daughter, comes to live with them.

The manifestations are not evil but vengeful. Carli spots odd, encroaching shadows; a toilet unaccountably flushes; the electric garage door slams up and down for no reason; the street lamp blinks without cause; and snakes and insects appear and vanish—and ravens and vultures collect.

A pepper tree in the Williamses' front yard serves as an apparent connection between life today and what's underground, and the more the Williamses investigate, the more possible the impossible becomes.

Thinking themselves the only hilltoppers being haunted, the family is surprised to learn that their neighbors are being spooked, too, but the Williamses are determined not to be driven out of their home.

Director John Patterson pulls off the scariness with conviction, and the reactions of the family members are, under his intelligent guidance, acceptable. Patterson and Goodell avoid the cheap shockers but do provide a few good chills.

A convincing David Selby in-

terprets the take-charge Shag, and Tina's fiance Daryl is played agreeably by Jon Maynard Pennell. David Soul is cast as a concerned homeowner, and gruff-voiced Blake Clark limns another troubled neighbor.

Chief laurels go to Patty Duke as the beset Jean. Duke shrewdly inhabits the role with no tricks, no embellishments. It's a surefire, consistent portrayal going straight to the heart of the character.

Designer Roy Alan Amaral

hands the vidmovie an everyday look, making the horror elements that much more worrisome.

A sensible score by Patrick Williams eschews the usual scare-'em blasts, and Shelly Johnson's no-nonsense camerawork has the grace to remain true to the vidpic's purpose—to show what happens to a family under pressure.

Tech credits are neat, and only one question really persists: Why doesn't someone chop down that pepper tree?

—Tony Scott

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