

THE INVENTION OF SEEDS

*Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us,
giving us moments of wonder and joy. - Robin Wall Kimmerer*

Draft 5 - 5/20/22

CHARACTERS

JESSIE - a teenager, wants to get out of Indiana, also a seed

DAVID - a farmer in rural Indiana, also the soil

INVESTIGATOR - an iGrow-hired private investigator, also possibly a crow

TOUR GUIDE - a Purdue Univ campus tour guide

A SCIENTIST - a South African biogeneticist at Purdue University, believes they are the center of the earth

MINER - a South African gold mine worker

A SEED - a GMO seed who has traveled across a continent and been planted in the ground

THE SOIL - the black-brown dirt, doing their best to care for the seed

THE CENTER OF THE EARTH - immense, grieving, we are all part of her

THE KID - in 2064, a kid in a community recover program

VOICES - Radio Announcer

Track 1 - DAVID, THE SOIL

Track 2 - JESSIE, A SEED

Track 3 - INVESTIGATOR, TOUR GUIDE, RADIO ANNOUNCER, THE KID

Track 4 - MINER, A SCIENTIST, THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

Note: The Seed, The Soil, and The Center of the Earth are probably all puppets.

ACT 1: "I Made This" Installation

The audience walks in through a multidisciplinary installation. It's JESSIE's senior portfolio application to get into the Art Institute of Chicago.

- *Video channel 1: footage of an Indigenous farmer planting seeds using their bare hands. They water the seeds and pat the earth. An elder holding a multicolored ear of corn. They run their fingers over it tenderly.*
- *Video channel 2: footage of industrial harvesters and crop dusters. Mechanization. Seeds on conveyor belts.*
- *Living sculpture 1: a living corn seedling planted between two sheets of glass, like an ant farm, so we can see the root structure. A fine art frame surrounds it.*
- *Living sculpture 2: a living soybean seedling planted between two sheets of glass so we can see the root structure. A fine art frame surrounds it.*
- *Dormant sculpture: a GMO DNA model made out of corn seeds.*
- *Dead sculpture: a petri dish with a tiny model tractor.*
- *Archway: "I MADE THIS" in giant shiny metallic lettering. All the audience must pass underneath it to enter the theatre space.*

ACT 2: Play

Curtain speech placeholder. Yes, I will want to write this later.

1. *A few questions*

*In the darkness, the sound of springtime rain.
A chorus of peepers.
Lights rise focused on the branches of an
early blooming tree. A wind blows and some
of the white petals float across the stage like
snow.
Far away, the earth rumbles.
The soil beneath us feels it.
The call of a meadowlark.
Then, radio static and lights flicker into
darkness.*

MINER

(on the radio through choppy static) Hello! Can anyone hear me? I'm stuck!

*Lights widen on an old farmhouse with a
rusted roof in rural Indiana in 2005. The sun
sets behind the house and casts a silhouette
of a tired barn. Several bushels of soybean
seeds and corn seeds sit by the door. It's
planting season.*

DAVID, a 4th generation farmer wearing a Purdue Agriculture hoodie, sits at a wooden table eating split pea soup. He listens to the radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

At around midday yesterday, an earthquake measuring 5.3 on the Richter scale occurred 2,400 metres below the earth's surface in a small town in South Africa not far from Johannesburg. According to the company authorities at the DRD Gold Mine, of the 3,200 miners initially underground, nearly all were brought to the surface safely by 6pm. 42 miners remain trapped. Search and rescue teams are making frantic efforts to reach them. This is WSIR, your local radio news network. We'll be right back after this. Stay tuned, Indiana.

JESSIE, DAVID's nonbinary teenager walks in and gets a bowl of soup.

Split pea soup again?

JESSIE

Hey, pass me the-

DAVID

JESSIE hands David some salt. JESSIE shakes their head.

What?

DAVID (cont'd)

That's gonna kill you someday.

JESSIE

Hasn't yet.

DAVID

DAVID pours way too much salt in his soup.

You finished your homework?

DAVID (Cont'd)

JESSIE sighs.

Well did / you?

DAVID (Cont'd)

/ Yah yah.

JESSIE

They did not.

DAVID

Jessie.

JESSIE

Soup's good, eh?

*JESSIE spoons some soup into their mouth.
It's not good.*

DAVID smirks and passes JESSIE the salt.

DAVID

Do you need help on your biology?

JESSIE

No.

JESSIE pours some salt into their soup.

JESSIE (Cont'd)

It's just a worksheet.

DAVID

About what?

JESSIE

Genetics. It's another Punnett square and a personal reflection paragraph.
Hey, what color were grandpa's eyes?

DAVID

What?

JESSIE

Did grandpa have green eyes?

DAVID

My dad?

JESSIE

Yeah. I have to write it down for the thing.

DAVID pictures his dad's face.

DAVID

Yeah. He did.
You know, they used to call him "Green Bean."

JESSIE
(confused) Green Bean? What?

DAVID
Nickname.

JESSIE
Weird...
That's like "little bean."
Are we a family of beans?

DAVID
I think it was because of his eyes.

JESSIE
(changing tone) I miss mom.

DAVID
Yeah... Me too...

JESSIE
(a beat and then smirking) She made good soup.

DAVID
Ok ok.
Why don't *you* cook sometime if you're such a culinary expert?

They chuckle together and then the radio eerily crackles with static and jumbled noise.

DAVID
Hey turn that thing off, will you?

JESSIE gets up to turn the radio off. The radio crackles again.

MINER (on the radio, choppy)
...hello?..... Stuck... anyone hear...

JESSIE
Did you hear that?

DAVID

Hear what? It's static. Antenna must be down again.

JESSIE listens to the static for a moment, but it's just static now so they turn the radio off.

DAVID (cont'd)

I'll fix it tomorrow.

*A knock on the door. They both look. No one ever knocks on the door.
Another knock.*

JESSIE

Who's that?

DAVID looks at his watch and rises to answer the door.

DAVID

I don't know.

*DAVID opens the door.
The INVESTIGATOR stands outside with a clipboard. She wears a baseball hat, or something else non-investigator-y. She looks like she could just be a neighbor.*

DAVID (Cont'd)

Hi. Can I help you?

INVESTIGATOR

Hi. My name is Taylor. I'm doing a survey for a story in Farmer's Quarterly Magazine. We're stopping by all the farms in the area to gather information to be published in our next issue.

DAVID

Oh. Ok. Well, what can I do for you?

INVESTIGATOR

Can I ask you a few questions?

DAVID

Right now?

INVESTIGATOR

Yeah. Is that- I mean is that ok?

DAVID

Uh. Sure.

INVESTIGATOR

Great! So this is a family farm?

DAVID

That's right.

INVESTIGATOR

And you're the owner?

DAVID nods. The INVESTIGATOR makes notes on her clipboard.

INVESTIGATOR (cont'd)

Oh! I almost forgot!

She pulls out a handheld voice recorder.

INVESTIGATOR (cont'd)

Do you mind if I record you?
It's just for the story. I don't want to miss anything.

DAVID

(not convinced) Uh... ok. Sure.

INVESTIGATOR

Great. Ok, can I ask your name?

DAVID

David Boisseau.

JESSIE rises to see what's going on.

INVESTIGATOR

Hi.

DAVID

Go get your homework started. This'll just be a minute.

JESSIE leans on a wall nearby, listening. The INVESTIGATOR smiles at JESSIE. JESSIE stares.

INVESTIGATOR

Uh. Right. Ok. What kinds of crops do you raise?

DAVID

Soybeans, corn, wheat, and tomatoes. Uh and some cover crops. Mostly alfalfa and ryegrass.

INVESTIGATOR

And how many acres total do you work?

DAVID

105.

INVESTIGATOR

105. Mmm hmm.

And uh. Let's see. Soy, corn, wheat, and-
Is any of that soy and corn food-grade?

DAVID

(with pride) Yes, ma'am.

THE INVESTIGATOR marks something on her clipboard and then looks at David.

INVESTIGATOR

Wow. That's great.

THE INVESTIGATOR puts her pen in her mouth and flips the paper over on her clipboard.

DAVID

Yeah. It is.

How many more questions are there?

INVESTIGATOR

It's just a few more. What company do you use to source your seeds? And their contact's name and phone number.

DAVID

What?

INVESTIGATOR

The seed company you use.

DAVID

No I heard you. Why do you / need

INVESTIGATOR

/ It's just for the survey.

JESSIE

What's the survey?

THE INVESTIGATOR eyes JESSIE.

INVESTIGATOR

It's for a story in Farmers Magazine Quarterly.

JESSIE

What's that?

INVESTIGATOR

It's a magazine for local farmers. I'd be happy to sign you up for a free issue if you can just answer those last two questions.

JESSIE

We don't use a seed company.

DAVID

Jessie.

THE INVESTIGATOR raises an eyebrow and scribbles something on the clipboard.

INVESTIGATOR

You don't? Really?

JESSIE

We clean and separate our seeds here.

DAVID.

Jessie. I told you to go do your homework.

INVESTIGATOR

Interesting.

Ok, so Mr. Boisseau, may I have your phone number?

DAVID

No. That's enough.

INVESTIGATOR

What? I just need your phone number in case there are any follow ups.
For the story.

DAVID

You're really selling that, huh?

INVESTIGATOR

Sir? What are you talking about?

DAVID stares at THE INVESTIGATOR.

JESSIE

Dad?

DAVID

You know what, it's a Sunday night. We're in the middle of dinner. I think you should go.

INVESTIGATOR

Sir. Don't you/

DAVID

/No. We're done here. Good night.

INVESTIGATOR

Uh...

DAVID shuts the door. Outside, THE INVESTIGATOR walks a few steps and makes a call on her cell phone. She looks at the old barn in the distance.

JESSIE

What was that about?

DAVID

I don't know. But I don't think it's-

INVESTIGATOR

(on her phone) He's guilty.

DAVID and JESSIE look to one another, shocked.

Lights shift.

2. *A beginning*

*Under the ground, some water trickles.
A bit of light flickers through.
The SEED wiggles and wakes.*

Ooh.

SEED

*They wiggle some more and then look
around.*

Um. Hello?

SEED (Cont'd)

...

Where...?

What is this?

Hello?

Is anyone there?

Hello?

*They start to panic a little. Then, they softly
reach toward the light.*

Ooh. What's...?

SEED

The reaching wakes the SOIL.

Woah there. Who are you?

SOIL

Me?

SEED

Yeah. You, kid.

SOIL

I'm "Soybean A498Y34.2035"

SEED

....

You're who?

SOIL

SEED

Soybean A498Y34.2035

I was born in San Francisco.

I have 10 billion identical twins, and we all have the same name.

Some of my twins and I were shipped across the continent in a big metal box. It was a bumpy ride.

We rode up into the mountains and through the high deserts while stars shot across the galaxy.

We rode across the Great Divide. THE GREAT DIVIDE.

At the time, I wondered what that meant.

My twins didn't wonder, but I did. ...The Great... Divide....

On one side, the water flows back west toward San Francisco.

But after you cross THE GREAT DIVIDE, the rivers all flow east.

Isn't that remarkable?

And then the EARTH SHOOK underneath us and the whole world turned upside down

And we all fell out of the big metal box on top of each other

and now here I am, in a place called Indy-anna.

And

And and and

And I have a question.

SOIL

....

What's that?

SEED

When did it start?

SOIL

When did what start?

SEED

The world.

Lights shift.

3. DNA

It's a few days later.

JESSIE sits at the kitchen table, making a candy DNA model out of twizzlers, gumdrops, and toothpicks.

They struggle to get it to stay together. Just as they try to make it stand on its own, they take their hands away and it falls apart.

Come on.

JESSIE

They start again.

DAVID walks in from outside, dirty and tired from a long day working in the fields. JESSIE doesn't look up. They concentrate on finishing the DNA helix.

Hey kiddo.
What's all this?

DAVID

DNA.

JESSIE

Looks like sugar to me.

DAVID

Ha. Ha. DAD.

JESSIE

DAVID cracks a smile.

(offering a piece of candy) Want one?

JESSIE (Cont'd)

DAVID takes it and pops it in his mouth.

Mmmmm. Science tastes good, eh?

DAVID

DAVID sits at the table and watches JESSIE work.

DAVID (Cont'd)

Did you give any more thought to-

JESSIE

No.

DAVID

Are you going-

JESSIE

Dad.

DAVID

Jessie.

JESSIE

Can I finish this?

It falls apart again. JESSIE lets out a GROAN.

JESSIE

I hate biology.

DAVID

Need some help?

JESSIE

No.

DAVID rises and goes to the cabinets to retrieve a bamboo skewer.

JESSIE (Cont'd)

Oh the mail came. It's over on the-

DAVID picks up a couple of envelopes, glances at them, and shoves them under his arm. JESSIE keeps fiddling with the model and trying to make it stand on its own. DAVID returns to the table and puts the bamboo skewer upright in the middle of JESSIE's model.

JESSIE

Dad! What are you-

DAVID

Here. It's like a beanstalk. It needs something to hold on to to keep itself standing.

JESSIE rolls their eyes and resets the model. It stands. JESSIE wonders why it's so irritating when parents are right.

JESSIE

Thanks...

DAVID takes an extra piece of candy and pops it in his mouth. JESSIE grins and eats one too.

DAVID

Done now?

JESSIE

I guess, but/-

DAVID

I really want you to consider/-

JESSIE

Come on. Dad. I want to go to the Art Institute.
I want to go to Chicago.

DAVID

What's in Chicago anyway?

JESSIE

People.

DAVID

What am I?

JESSIE

...
More people.

DAVID

There's more people at Purdue. And you'll be closer to me.

JESSIE

Dad.

DAVID

I worry about you.

JESSIE

I know. But that's not-

I can't stay here forever...

I've never been outside of Indiana. The Art Institute has these study trips and semester away things in India and South Africa. And I really/-

DAVID

/India and South Africa? Who d'you think is paying for that?

JESSIE

I will.

DAVID

You got some kind of side hustle I don't know about?

JESSIE

Yeah, now I know the secret. I'm gonna sell these sticks to everyone in my class.

DAVID

Uh huh.

JESSIE

Yeah, but I'll call them Jessie's DNA Holders,™.

DAVID

You know... Purdue has business degrees.

JESSIE

I'm not talking about business. I'm talking about art. Like that guy. You know, the toilet bowl guy.

DAVID opens one of the envelopes.

DAVID

Jessie, come on, I'm serious. / What will it take for you to consider-

DAVID reads the piece of mail with growing alarm.

JESSIE

What was his name? Mmmm. Something with an 'm'... Marc. Mondri- no.

Shit. What was-

Manet? No.

Oh oh oh! Marcel Duchamp!

You know that guy?
He's the one that took an old toilet bowl and called it "art."

JESSIE cracks themselves up with this idea.

JESSIE (Cont'd)

It's like-
He didn't even make it. It came from some factory. Painted some letters on it and-
(*noticing DAVID's alarm at the letter*)
What?
What is it?

DAVID

It's-
Oh my god...

JESSIE

What? What?

DAVID rises and paces around the kitchen.

DAVID

I knew she wasn't working with some magazine.

JESSIE

That woman from the other day?

DAVID

They want all my records.

JESSIE

What? Dad?

DAVID

They're suing us.

JESSIE

Who?

DAVID

iGrow.

JESSIE

That giant seed company? For what?

DAVID

Patent infringement.

Lights shift.

4. Even rocks have been known to move

2 km under the earth's surface in Stilfontein, South Africa. A MINER wearing a headlamp and gumboots shovels dirt into a cart. The MINER hums a beat while she works.

Suddenly the rocks lightly tremor. The MINER stops and looks around. She calls out to a coworker offstage.

MINER

Eeey! Sam!
Did you feel that?
Sam?

*The rocks rumble again. The underground work lights flicker.
Lights shift.*

5. Produce

In David and Jessie's house, the bags of seeds have conspicuously vanished. DAVID sits at the table with a cardboard box of documents. He listens to the radio while concentrating on a stack of papers and receipts in front of him.

RADIO

Major evacuation of the miners trapped underground at the Stilfontein gold mine has completed. According to the South African Red Cross, 12 workers remain to be brought to safety.

JESSIE walks in wearing a napster tshirt, listening to headphones connected to an iPod. They're dancing along to their music.

RADIO

We'll be right back with more after this. This is WSIR. Stay tuned, Indiana.

The radio plays some music.

Can you turn that off?

DAVID

JESSIE can't hear DAVID and looks for something to eat. They can't find what they want.

We outta Sunny D?

JESSIE

Drink water instead.

DAVID

What?

JESSIE

JESSIE removes their headphones.

I said, drink water instead.

DAVID

Uh... ok...

JESSIE

You know how much a gallon of that costs?

DAVID

JESSIE rolls their eyes and joins their father at the table. DAVID rises to turn the radio off.

What's all this?

JESSIE

This is... everything.

DAVID

Everything? What's that/ mean?

JESSIE

/ It's all of it.

DAVID

JESSIE picks up a paper.

Bank statements?

JESSIE

DAVID
I have to produce the last 10 years of business records.

JESSIE
For the-

DAVID
Yeah. They want everything back to 1995.

JESSIE
Why?

DAVID
That's when they got the patent.

JESSIE thumbs through some papers.

JESSIE
This is crazy.

DAVID
....
Yeah well-

JESSIE
No, but I mean. This is crazy. You're not- We're not-
I mean- they can't win, right?

DAVID
...
I don't know, Jessie.
Here, help me put these in order.

DAVID passes JESSIE a stack of papers.

JESSIE
You know they have these things called computers now? We even have one!

DAVID
Sort through those and put them in order by month and year.

JESSIE
What did Paula say?

DAVID

We have to send it by Saturday.

JESSIE

But what did-
She thinks this is nuts, right?
These people can't really patent a seed, can they?

DAVID

They can and they did.

JESSIE

....

That's the stupidest thing I ever heard.

DAVID

They changed the DNA, so I guess that's how they claim it's an invention.

JESSIE

That's like. That's like.
Like if I dye my hair purple and then tried to be like "ooh look, I invented hair."

DAVID

It's not like that. And don't even think about dying your hair.

JESSIE

Whatever.

DAVID

This is serious, Jessie.

JESSIE

I know. I get it.

DAVID

I don't think you do.
They're coming after all of us. And these people have lawyers.

JESSIE

Yeah, and we have Paula.

DAVID

You don't understand. I'm talking about rooms full of lawyers.
In fancy suits, with unlimited resources.

JESSIE

Paula can rock a pantsuit.

Stop it, Jessie.
They're going to drag this out for years.
And I- and they'll-
Maybe we'll have to settle...
I won't be able to-

DAVID

DAVID buries his head in his hands.

Hey, it'll be ok, Dad. We'll-
It'll be ok.

JESSIE

DAVID forlornly looks up at JESSIE.

You're my kid. You don't-
You shouldn't have to comfort me.
That's not your job.

DAVID

Outside, it begins to rain.

It's ok. It's ok.

JESSIE

Lights shift.

6. The unending spiral

The SEED and SOIL as before. Water seeps into the earth.

Oooh that tickles!

SEED

THE SOIL chuckles at the SEED.

Hmm. Haven't I been here before?

SEED

No. I don't think so.
This is the first time we've met.

SOIL

SEED

It is! I'm sorry.
Who are you?

THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

Groaaaaaaaaaaaaan

SEED

What was that?

SOIL

You heard too? That was/ the

SEED

/It sounded like...
Hmm I don't know what that sounded like
But I recognized it
From some place deep within me

SOIL

You did?

SEED

I don't know what that means

SOIL

You recognized it?

The SEED gets worked up.

SEED

Don't you think that groan
Carried a meaning?!
I think someone was trying to communicate something!

SOIL

Hey, why don't you relax?
Take a breath.

SEED

That noise...
I think it holds the key!
I heard about this when I was in the big metal truck traveling across THE GREAT DIVIDE.

SOIL

The kee? What is a kee?

A key is...
A key is like code.
A key is a thing that causes unlocking

SEED

“Locking?”

SOIL

Yeah! Come on. To hold in place, to freeze, to stop, to...
I don't know to lock / up

SEED

/How would you ever do that?

SOIL

Do what?

SEED

“Lack” something.

SOIL

Lock something.

SEED

Yes, how would you ever lack something?

SOIL

Hisssssssssssss

THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

There it is again
But it was different this time...
It's trying to communicate!

SEED

Light shift.

7. crows

A day later, JESSIE sits in a tractor cockpit in a field by the road. They have their headphones in again and they sing a few lyrics from Kanye West's "Gold digger" outloud.

JESSIE

Uhn I ain't sayin she a gold digger
But she ain't messin with a broke broke
I ain't sayin she a-

Unbeknownst to JESSIE, the INVESTIGATOR walks furtively down the road behind the tractor, watching. She pops out from behind a tree or a road sign like a whack-a-mole. She sees a seed on the road, picks it up and puts it in a plastic evidence bag.

She ain't messin with a-

JESSIE

Something crunches under the tractor.

What the-
Son of a-

JESSIE

JESSIE gets down to inspect. While their back is turned, the INVESTIGATOR moves closer to investigate. JESSIE pulls a sad, mangled scarecrow out of the tiller.

Oh man...
Sorry Mr. Lucky.
How'd we forget about you out here?

JESSIE

JESSIE tries to make Mr. Lucky stand up straight. He slumps, limbs hanging precariously.

Man.

JESSIE

The INVESTIGATOR snaps a photo. JESSIE hears and abruptly brandishes Mr. Lucky as a defense weapon.

Who's there?

JESSIE

JESSIE sees the INVESTIGATOR.

JESSIE (cont'd)

What are you doing here?

INVESTIGATOR

Me?

JESSIE

....

Who else?!

INVESTIGATOR

Take it easy, kid.

JESSIE

What do you want?

INVESTIGATOR

I'm just... observing... for my article in Farmers Quarterly / Magazine. What's your name?

JESSIE

/ Oh come on. There's no such thing.

JESSIE brandishes Mr. Lucky.

INVESTIGATOR

Hey! What are you doing?! Put that thing-

JESSIE

I'm not stupid.

You work for one of those-

iGrow? New Seeds Unlimited? Which one?

INVESTIGATOR

(referring to JESSIE's weapon) What is that?

JESSIE

It's a scarecrow.

That's not the-

INVESTIGATOR

Not very scary, eh? You run it over?

JESSIE

It was an accident. What? That's not the point.

You need to leave us alone!

*JESSIE takes a step forward and swings Mr. Lucky at the INVESTIGATOR.
The INVESTIGATOR squawks like a crow.*

INVESTIGATOR

Wah! Hey! Put that thing down, kid.

JESSIE

I'll put it down when you get the hell out of here.

INVESTIGATOR

I'm not trying to hurt you.

JESSIE

Yes you are!

INVESTIGATOR

I'm just minding my business, doing my job. Just like you.

JESSIE

Get out of here!

With one hand, JESSIE pulls their cell phone out of their pocket.

INVESTIGATOR

What, are you calling the police?

JESSIE

You're harassing us!

INVESTIGATOR

Harassing?! It's a free country. I'm just walking down the road!

JESSIE

You're on private property!

JESSIE waves the phone in the air looking for a signal. Nothing. The INVESTIGATOR chuckles.

JESSIE (cont'd)

Dammit.

JESSIE brandishes Mr. Lucky one last time. Its head falls off. JESSIE sighs with a frown.

The INVESTIGATOR relaxes.

INVESTIGATOR

I'm not saying you and your daddy broke the law, but the way I see it, according to what they say, Seems like you might've.

JESSIE

Oh fuck you, lady. What are you even talking about?

INVESTIGATOR

If y'all are growing their plants and you didn't pay the royalty... Then you stole em. Simple as that, and you deserve whatever consequences you get.

JESSIE

Nobody stole anything. Except you! Gimme those seeds back.

JESSIE lunges for the evidence bags in the INVESTIGATOR's hand. The INVESTIGATOR turns and runs.

INVESTIGATOR

Look, kid. I'm just doing a job, same as you. I'll be on my way, ok?

The INVESTIGATOR exits.

JESSIE

(calling after her)
We are not the same!

*JESSIE picks up Mr. Lucky's head and tries to put it back on. It won't stay.
JESSIE looks at Mr. Lucky's mangled face.*

JESSIE

We're not the same...

Lights shift.

8. The heartbeat of the world

*Underground at the Stilfontein Mine, the MINER does a gumboot dance.
As the MINER dances, veins of gold or maybe roots begin to glow and pulse in rhythm all around her.*

The dance speeds up.

Sudden shift.

9. I made this

DAVID stands in the farmhouse with a large envelope full of all his organized business records for the last 10 years. He takes a swig of whiskey and seals the envelope. He goes out to put it in the mail.

JESSIE carries what looks like an oversized antfarm - two framed rectangular pieces of glass with dirt in the middle - and places it on the kitchen table.

The sound of a crow. JESSIE jumps.

DAVID walks back in and wipes sweat off his brow.

Well.

DAVID

Well?

JESSIE

I sent it.

DAVID

That's good right?

JESSIE

We'll find out...
You done with your genetics unit already?

DAVID

What? This?

JESSIE

You on to ecology now?

DAVID

This is for my art class.

JESSIE

Looks like an ant farm...

DAVID

It kind of is. But it's not that.

JESSIE

You're gonna draw an ant farm? Is this a..
What'd'you call it? Still life?

DAVID

Yeah. I mean, no.

JESSIE

What?

DAVID

A still life is the thing you draw from- but that's not-
This is for my portfolio for... AP art.

JESSIE

For what? Jessie, I told you-

DAVID

I know. I know. It's for AP Art. It's like-
you turn in a portfolio and they give you a score, and if you score high enough, you get college
credit. That's good, right?

JESSIE

You're going to get college art credit for an ant farm?

DAVID

No. It's not an ant farm.
There's an iGrow soybean seed in here.

JESSIE

What did you say? A what?!

DAVID

I know, Dad. I know.

JESSIE

Where did you- Jessie.
What are you doing with that seed?

DAVID

JESSIE

It's for my art class.

DAVID

Jessie. We are in the middle of a lawsuit that could-
Do you think this is a joke?

JESSIE

No, I don't think it's a joke.
I think it's fucked up so I'm making art about it.

DAVID

Hey! Watch it.

JESSIE

Sorry. But it *is* messed up. The whole thing.

DAVID

Yeah. It is.

...

JESSIE

...

So d'you wanna know what I'm calling this piece?

DAVID

(making fun) "This piece"? OoOoh fancy...

JESSIE

Yeah, Dad. This piece of *art...* that your *child* made.
That half of *your* genetic code, wrapped in meat and electricity, produced.

DAVID

Ok. Ok. Sorry.
What are you calling *(mocking)* "this piece?"

JESSIE

Don't be a jerk.

DAVID

I'm not! I'm asking!
(lying) I am genuinely interested.
What are you calling it?

JESSIE

"I made this."

DAVID

I know you made it. You've made your point. I'm sorry.
What are you calling this beautiful... artwork...?

JESSIE

No. "I made this." That's the name: "I made this."

DAVID

I don't-
Am I missing something?

JESSIE laughs.

JESSIE

No. You're not-
It's like Marcel Duchamp.

DAVID

Who?

JESSIE

The toilet bowl guy.

DAVID

The plumber's name is Eddie.

JESSIE

No. Remember? I told you about him the other-
Anyway it doesn't matter.
I think it's stupid that these iGrow people can take a seed and be like "I created this."
Like "I have made something new and therefore I own it. FOREVER. It is MINE."

DAVID

Stupid doesn't cover it.

JESSIE

Sure. These people think they're Gods...

DAVID

Since when are you offended on behalf of God?

JESSIE

Come off it DAD.
We're not having *that* conversation right now.

I'm just saying-

DAVID

Well don't.

JESSIE

...
So anyway. It's messed up. And what they're doing to us and the Hernandezes... it's-
Joey told me her brother had to postpone his wedding/

Oh really?

DAVID

JESSIE
Yeah because of.. Something to do with how much the lawyer costs...
He got a second job to help them pay for it.

...
I just think that's like... Evil.
Like iGrow is evil.

Well... I think that's a big word.

DAVID

JESSIE
You don't think so?! You just dug up all those those records to prove we don't-
That we didn't break the law by planting our own seeds. That's insane!

*DAVID pours himself another glass of
whiskey.
JESSIE stops him.*

Dad.

JESSIE (Cont'd)

Evil's a big word, Jessie.

DAVID

Well when the shoe fits...

JESSIE

DAVID
...
So... what are you trying to prove with the stolen seed?

JESSIE
It's not a stolen seed. I found it. Didn't you hear that one of those big grain transport trucks
overturned down on I-70? I went down there this morning... and I found this seed.

Jessie. DAVID

It's art, Dad. I'm just doing what they did! JESSIE

What? DAVID

I took something that already existed, this seed. And I modified with this frame, and now it's a new thing... it's art. And I made it. JESSIE
I made this.

Oh my god... DAVID
This isn't funny.

I know it's not funny! / That's why I'm- JESSIE

/I don't think you do! DAVID
Jessie. I had to dip into your college fund to pay for the lawyer-.

You what? JESSIE

I had to... and it's just going to keep going. DAVID
they're trying to bury us.

What do you mean you dipped into the college fund? JESSIE

I'm sorry, Jessie. DAVID

No. What? JESSIE
Dad...

Purdue is a really good school- / DAVID

JESSIE
/ I'm not going to Purdue!

DAVID
And it's in-state tuition.

JESSIE
Dad! Are you kidding?

DAVID
...
No. I told you.
It's not a joke.

Lights shift.

10. Trying to communicate

*The SEED and the SOIL as before.
The earth trembles and minerals pulse
through the ground.*

SEED
There it is AGAIN! It's trying to say something!

SOIL
Not everything is trying to "communicate"
Some things... just are.

SEED
But it groaned and it hissed!

SOIL
You don't understand.
You say "It"
"It" is the Center of the Earth.

SEED
The Center of the Earth! Wow!

SOIL
She just... gurgles... from time to time. You know, releases gasses...
She *speaks* in the rhythms of generations,
She doesn't communicate in the way that /

SEED

I feel it inside me!
Hello? CENTER OF THE EARTH? HELLO?
It's ME SOYBEAN A498Y34.2035.
I need to know the answer.
Where was I before the bright fluorescent lights of San Francisco?
I know how I came to be here in Indiana.
I can trace the journey backwards across THE GREAT DIVIDE.
But where did it start? WHERE DID I COME FROM?
CENTER OF THE EARTH?!?!?
I recognize you inside myself
But I don't know how to talk to you
I'm here. In Indiana. Wrapped up in this very nice soil, and the soil seems very kind and all.

SOIL

Thanks.

SEED

But I really need to know.
I'm afraid of something I don't know how to explain
Is it ok I'm here? I don't know how to be anywhere else.
Where do I belong? CENTER OF THE EARTH?!?! HELLO???

*Silence.
The SEED's little soybean heart starts to
break.
Lights shift.*

11. Surveillance

Early morning light pours onto the farm.

*Outside, DAVID walks around the tractor. He
pats it on the front, like a horse. He hooks up
a seed spreader to the tractor.*

*Then, DAVID goes into the house and hauls
one of the big seed bags out.*

DAVID

(muttering to himself, in a kind of prayer)
Behold a sower went out to sow...

*Some of the seed spills onto the ground.
DAVID keeps pouring.*

DAVID (Cont'd)

And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside...

The INVESTIGATOR appears, hiding. DAVID notices, but acts like he doesn't see her. She pulls out a video camera and starts recording.

DAVID (Cont'd)

Others fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked them out.

DAVID puts the bag down and runs his hand tenderly over the seeds. He takes the bag back over to the side of the house and goes inside.

The INVESTIGATOR tiptoes in and picks up a few seeds from the tractor.

DAVID enters with a shotgun pointed at the INVESTIGATOR.

DAVID

Get off my property!

The INVESTIGATOR turns and sees the gun. They throw their hands up and seeds go flying.

INVESTIGATOR

Heyyy! Woah.... Hey!

DAVID

I said. Get off. My property.

The INVESTIGATOR backs up.

INVESTIGATOR

Ok. Ok. You can put that down.

DAVID

I will when you get the hell out of here.

INVESTIGATOR

Ok buddy. I'm-

DAVID

I'm not your buddy.
How long have you been out here watching?

INVESTIGATOR

It's just a job, man.

DAVID

I should have you arrested.

INVESTIGATOR

(smiling wide)
Sheriff's on the iGrow board.

DAVID

....

INVESTIGATOR

One of the biggest shareholders.

DAVID

You're bluffing...

INVESTIGATOR

Call him up and find out.

*DAVID raises the gun again. The
INVESTIGATOR backs up.*

DAVID

I will.

INVESTIGATOR

Ok David. I'm leaving.
You're not going to shoot me.

*The INVESTIGATOR turns to exit. DAVID puts
the gun down.*

DAVID

You know, what's wrong with you?

INVESTIGATOR

What?

DAVID

How do you sleep at night?

(a beat) This is my livelihood. I got a kid.

INVESTIGATOR

Yeah. Me too.
I got three.

DAVID

So doesn't it bother you that you're destroying people's future? My *kid's* future...

INVESTIGATOR

Me? I didn't do anything. But that sounds like a confession if you ask me.

DAVID

A confession?!

The INVESTIGATOR reveals a recorder and clicks it off.

INVESTIGATOR

iGrow's a good company, you know? They take care of their people.

DAVID

What's that like?

INVESTIGATOR

What?

DAVID

To be taken care of.

*Lights shift.
The sound of wings.*

12. Jessie

JESSIE sits at a desk with an old 2000s era computer, working on a college essay.

JESSIE

Personal statement. Personal statement...

Um. (*starting in an affected scholarly voice*) When I was but a young child, I thought the only thing I wanted to be was a farmer like my dad, but then in 9th grade, I had to go to art therapy after my mother died... uh passed away, and I learned... I learned...

Ugh...

JESSIE gets up and paces around.

JESSIE (cont'd)

(trying a different persona) I want to go to college because I believe education is the most important thing for society. Education helps us understand who we are and how to be... good citizens...?

Ughhhhhhhh....

Hello. My name is Jessie Boisseau. Don't call me Jessica.

I have a dead mom and an alive dad and I really want to go to your school.

Ugh...

JESSIE gives up and picks up a Purdue Univ brochure. They look at it for a moment and then drop it on the desk.

Then JESSIE secretly pulls an AIC brochure out of their backpack.

DAVID (from off)

Jessie?

JESSIE hides the AIC brochure.

DAVID (still off)

What're you working on?

JESSIE

(calling) Personal statement for college!

DAVID peeks in.

DAVID

Oh, that's good. Need any help?

JESSIE

No!

DAVID

You're gonna love Purdue, sweet girl. I promise.

JESSIE

Dad. I told you. Don't call me that.

DAVID

Can't I express affection for my... child?

JESSIE

Not like that.

What am I supposed to say? DAVID

Anything else. JESSIE

But you're my daughter. You're my little g- DAVID

Ugh. We talked about this. JESSIE
I thought you read that book!

I did. I just... I'm too old for this. DAVID

You're not too old. JESSIE

Yeah I am. DAVID
(then, trying it out) They...
My kid Jessie is working on... their (?)... college essay...?

Yeah! Come on, David, you old fart. JESSIE
Stop looking at me like I've been abducted by an alien.
I'm still me. It's like... I'm just figuring out how to be *more* me.

You're plenty already. DAVID

JESSIE smiles. Then:

Wait, was that a compliment or an insult? JESSIE

They chuckle together.

Ok. Well, don't stay up too late. DAVID
We've got that meeting with Paula tomorrow to go over how we're gonna present our story.

I know. JESSIE

DAVID

Ok. I'll be upstairs.

...

(softly) Love you... Jay.

JESSIE hears the offer.

JESSIE

Love you too, Dad.

DAVID smiles and exits.

JESSIE picks up the Purdue brochure and starts reading. Their eyes light up.

JESSIE clicks on the internet. It's 2005 in rural Indiana. It's definitely dial-up.

DAVID (*calling from off*)

Jessie! I swear. You better not be downloading more music from that nap site!

JESSIE (*calling*)

I'm not! Promise!

*JESSIE sits at the computer and types excitedly.
Lights shift.*

13. Stuck

The MINER is stuck deep underground, pinned between rocks. She groans and tries to move.

MINER

Eyyy! Sam?! Help! I'm stuck!
Sam?!

Silence.

MINER

Shit. Shit. Shit.
Oh my god. What-

Nearby, her radio makes static noises. She reaches for it and just manages to grab it by the antenna.

Yes!

MINER

She clicks it a few times.

Hello? Can anyone hear me?

MINER

*Static.
She clicks the radio a few more times.*

Hello?! Sam? Is anyone there?
I'm trapped here. I was working in quadrant 214 when-

MINER

Static.

No...
I can't-

MINER

She tries to loosen some rocks. Nothing budes.

Shit...

MINER

Just when the MINER is about to lose hope, the tangled roots begin to glow and pulse.

CENTER OF THE EARTH!?!? HELLO?!?

SEED

*The MINER's eyes widen.
Lights shift.*

14. Purdue tour

DAVID and JESSIE are on a campus tour at Purdue University. Obviously, DAVID is wearing his Purdue Ag hoodie. A very peppy

TOUR GUIDE walks backwards and points out buildings.

TOUR GUIDE

Ok, future Boilermakers, we're now standing on Memorial Mall on the Hello Walk. Make sure to say hello to everyone you see! Hello! And on your right, you'll see the Loeb Fountain. Just ahead of us are the Purdue College of Agriculture buildings. I see you're wearing a- Are you an alum?

DAVID

Oh. Yeah. Class of 77. Hail Purdue!

The TOUR GUIDE sings a line from the fight song.

TOUR GUIDE

All hail to our old gold and black!

DAVID joins in the song.

DAVID / TOUR GUIDE

Hail, hail to old Purdue.

JESSIE

Oh my god...

DAVID

(elbowing JESSIE with a grin) What?

JESSIE hides their face.

TOUR GUIDE

As you all know, the Purdue College of Agriculture is home to many of the best programs in the country. We're #1 in Agricultural and Biological Engineering. Go, Boilermakers! If you're sticking around tonight, there's a really cool event happening that's free and open to the public. It's part of the Purdue-iGrow lecture series and tonight's event is about transgenic corn seed. Interesting, interesting! Now, Purdue was founded in 1869 as a public land grant university and classes began in 1874.

DAVID raises his hand.

TOUR GUIDE

Yes, sir?

DAVID

Do you all have international exchange? What do they call it? Study abroad?

JESSIE

Dad...

TOUR GUIDE

Oh! We do indeed!

(to *JESSIE*) Are you interested in a semester abroad?

JESSIE

Uh... I don't know.

DAVID

Come on. Yes. Jay wants to study in South Africa.

TOUR GUIDE

That's great! We do have programs there. Young Hall is just over there to our left. I'd recommend stopping by there before you leave so you can talk to the Study Abroad office.

JESSIE

I'm not-

I mean... I don't think I'm studying abroad...

TOUR GUIDE

Oh.. ok!

DAVID

Jessie, come on.

You said you wanted to go to-

JESSIE

(*sharply*) Drop it, Dad.

DAVID

Woah.

JESSIE

Let's just finish the tour.

TOUR GUIDE

Everything ok, Boilermakers?

Don't worry! I know college visits can be pretty emotional! We usually have a few criers before the end of every tour.

*JESSIE and DAVID stare at the TOUR GUIDE.
JESSIE notices something strange about the
TOUR GUIDE.*

TOUR GUIDE

... Ok! Well let's continue on, everyone.
Up ahead are many of Purdue's residence halls.

DAVID

(to JESSIE) Are you ok?

JESSIE

I'm fine.

DAVID

(to the TOUR GUIDE) You can go on ahead without us. We'll catch up. Thank you!

TOUR GUIDE

Oh ok! Are you sure?

JESSIE

What? Dad. Can we just-

JESSIE keeps walking with the TOUR GUIDE.

DAVID

Come here. I want to show you something.

*DAVID walks in the opposite direction.
The TOUR GUIDE waves at DAVID and exits.*

DAVID (Cont'd)

Come on. Private alumni tour.

*DAVID and JESSIE play the opposite of a
game of chicken. Who's going to turn
around and join the other first? Eventually,
JESSIE rolls their eyes and sighs loudly.
Lights shift.*

15. The meaning

*The call of a meadowlark. The SEED
breathes heavily. The minerals pulse slower.*

SEED

I just... I thought that...
Why did we make the journey underneath the galaxy?
I thought I recognized the voice-

I thought there would be a meaning...
I thought...

SOIL

Hey. It's ok.
You need some rest.
You've had a long day.

SEED

Yeah...yeah...
You're right.
Do you mind if I.. just um... sleep here?

SOIL

Of course. Shhh.

*The SEED goes to sleep and the SOIL hums.
Then, suddenly, static noises from a radio far
away.*

MINER

Hello? Who's there?

The SEED startles awake.

SEED

What? Who's that? Who's there?

MINER

Sam? Oh my god. Thank you.
Sam! Ey! I'm stuck down here. The rocks fell and and and
I can't move.

SEED

You can't move! Oh no!
That's terrible!

MINER

Sam?
Who's this?

SEED

I'm "Soybean A498Y34.2035"
Are you the CENTER OF THE EARTH?!?
Oh wow oh wow! I found you!

Am I dead?
Did I die?

MINER

Gosh, I hope not!
That would be very not good.
Then you couldn't tell me about the key!

SEED

What's happening? What key?

MINER

The story of when did my life start.
Center Of The Earth, where did I come from?

SEED

The MINER gives up trying to make sense of what's happening and settles into a different kind of space. The SOIL comforts her.

...Where did I come from?
Where did I...
I came from these rocks.
I came from this dirt, and dust.
...
I am not the center of the earth, little bean.
But I do know her heartbeat.

MINER

The Gumboot Dance rhythm plays softly.

I know her rhythm...
I can hear it even now.
Where did I...
where did we come from?

MINER (cont'd)

You're not the center of the earth?

SEED

No.

MINER

I thought she was trying to speak to me.

SEED

She is.

MINER

How do you know?

SEED

I can feel it.

MINER

The CENTER OF THE EARTH bubbles. The continents move.

I can feel it too.

SEED

I don't know how much longer I'll be here.

MINER

You're all alone, aren't you?

SEED

I... don't know.
I don't think I am.

MINER

Yeah. I'm here.
And this nice warm soil.

SEED

Thanks.

SOIL

...

SEED

And these bugs. And these roots. And these very pretty minerals.
And this weird glowy fungus. And this water. And

The minerals begin to glow and pulse beneath the ground. A ball of roots connecting the whole earth spills out like a galaxy just beneath our feet. From all around us, the CENTER OF THE EARTH sings.

CENTER OF THE EARTH

Tellllllllllllllllllllllll theeeeeemmmmm theeeeeeee ssssttttttoooooorrrrrryyyyyy.

The SEED recognizes her voice.

Lights shift.

16. The scientist

DAVID and JESSIE walk through the hall of a Purdue Ag building. JESSIE drags their feet.

DAVID
I had so many of my classes here.
Hey, are you ok?

JESSIE
I'm fine.
The lawsuit really sucks.

DAVID
Yeah. I wish you wouldn't worry about it.

JESSIE
Did you hear the tour guide? There's some iGrow lecture tonight.
They're everywhere.

DAVID
It's all about the money...

JESSIE
Seems like everything is.

DAVID
Look, we can go home.
I thought it would be good to get you out of the house, but...
... Maybe we can come back / once this is all-

JESSIE
/ Dad, I don't want to go here.

DAVID
it's what I can still afford.
And... it's a good school.

JESSIE
Not for what I want to do.

DAVID
When are you going to be serious?

I am serious! I'm just not *you*!

JESSIE

Well, now *that* I know to be true.

DAVID

What's that supposed to mean?

JESSIE

Nothing. You have always had your own mind. That's all.

DAVID

Isn't that a good thing? Don't you want me to have my own mind?

JESSIE

Sure. Yes. I don't know.
I just always thought you would...

DAVID

Thought I would what? Gladly takeover the farm and stay in west Indiana for the rest of my life?
Keep working the tired dusty soil til I die and get buried by the old cedar right next to everyone
that ever shared the same gene pool?

JESSIE

Yeah, Jessie. Yeah!
It's what we do.

DAVID

It's what *you* do! That's *your* life. And you're happy with it and it's what you wanted and that's
great. But... that's not me.

JESSIE

You're my kid.

DAVID

Dad, I don't wanna be a farmer.

JESSIE

*DAVID has known this for a long time, but
JESSIE's never actually said the words.*

Well. That farmland is gonna be yours when I'm gone. You're stuck with it. It's your responsibility
to- You know, you have to take care of the land.

DAVID

...
There's no one else...

There's no one else.

JESSIE

I don't wanna argue about this anymore.

JESSIE starts to leave. DAVID paces and then sees the number on the door.

DAVID

Hold on. Jessie, come here.

DAVID points out the door to a science lab.

DAVID (Cont'd)

I met your mom in this room.

JESSIE turns.

JESSIE

You did?

DAVID

Yeah. My god. September 1974. Sophomore soil science.

DAVID quietly opens the door and peeks in.

JESSIE

Dad! You can't just...

Lights rise on the science lab. The SCIENTIST, a Black South African woman, stands over a desk with rows of tiny seedlings under a grow light.

SCIENTIST

Can I help you?

DAVID

Oh, hi. I'm just... I'm an alum. Uh.. David Boisseau. Class of 77.
Do you mind if I show my kid-
I had a class in this room way back...

SCIENTIST

Oh! Yes, of course. Please come in. I'm Dr. Khumalo.

DAVID

Thanks. This is Jessie.
(exaggerating) *They're* applying here this fall. *They* are going to be a high school senior.

JESSIE is touched by DAVID trying. The SCIENTIST doesn't get it.

SCIENTIST

Um, yes. Hello Jessie.

JESSIE

What'd you say your name was?

SCIENTIST

Dr. Gugu Khumalo.

JESSIE

I emailed you.

DAVID

What?

JESSIE

I sent her an email.

SCIENTIST

I'm sorry?

JESSIE

You never replied. Did you not get it? I looked up your email address on the website. I was asking for help. You're Dr. Khumalo...!

DAVID

Jessie, what are you talking about?

SCIENTIST

....Oh yes. I read your message. I didn't know how you thought I could help.

JESSIE

She's the world's leading soybean geneticist. Didn't you just win a..

SCIENTIST

World Food Prize. Yes. Two years ago.

DAVID doesn't know what that means.

DAVID

Oh wow.

JESSIE

For your work on developing new kinds of soybeans with higher protein.

SCIENTIST

Yes, that's right. I've never had a fan before.

The SCIENTIST grins.

SCIENTIST (Cont'd)

Those new kinds of beans are going to be critical in helping Africa to feed itself.

JESSIE

Yeah. I read about that! / It's really cool.

DAVID

/ You did?

SCIENTIST

Thank you!

JESSIE

I emailed you because I thought you could help our case.

DAVID

You what?

SCIENTIST

Sorry?

JESSIE

I thought you could be like an expert witness.

DAVID

Jessie!

SCIENTIST

I'm sorry? I don't follow.

DAVID

It's nothing. Sorry to bother you Dr. Khumalo. I think we better get going.

JESSIE

No wait. Dad. I/-

DAVID

/ You don't know what you're talking about! Leave this all to me and Paula. You shouldn't be talking to anyone about- let alone emailing!

JESSIE

I want to go to Chicago!

DAVID

What does that have to do with this?

SCIENTIST

Is everything... ok?

DAVID

Oh, we're fine. Sorry to disturb you. We'll be-

JESSIE

No! Everything is not ok. We're being sued and harassed by iGrow.

DAVID

Holy shit, Jessie.

DAVID sits down.

SCIENTIST

I'm sorry. I still don't...

JESSIE

We have a small farm. Mostly we just grow enough to sell locally. You know, helping our community feed themselves. Like you!

SCIENTIST

That's good.

JESSIE

And we grow soybeans and corn and iGrow is trying to sue us over patent infringement. Isn't that right, Dad?

DAVID

Yeah.. yep..

JESSIE

Can you believe that? Patent infringement! Copyright! It's crazy. They're trying to say they invented seeds!

SCIENTIST

Well, *did* you grow their seeds?

JESSIE

What? No.

DAVID

Jay, don't say another word. Do you work for them? Are you recording this?

DAVID looks for recording devices around the room.

SCIENTIST

Me? No. I don't work for iGrow.

I'm not recording-

What? Have they been recording you?

DAVID

You wouldn't believe.

JESSIE

They show up at our house, follow us around, take pictures and videos of our fields. Steal "samples" from our crops as "evidence." It's harassment. Like it's evil.

And besides that it's weird.

I'm pretty sure the investigator is a crow.

DAVID

What?

JESSIE

Never mind. It doesn't matter.

SCIENTIST

I'm sorry to hear all that.

JESSIE

Thanks.

SCIENTIST

But if you didn't use their seeds, then it sounds like they don't really have a case. So.. I still don't know how I could help you.

JESSIE

Well even if they don't have a case, they're already acting like we're guilty.

We're under surveillance in our own home.

And they've sued 25 farmers in our town!

One of our neighbors just filed for bankruptcy. It's terrible. He's got a wife and four kids younger than me.

SCIENTIST

Well, I don't agree with their methods.

JESSIE

...Wait but you agree with the principle?

SCIENTIST

I'm sorry..?

JESSIE

You said you don't agree with their methods. So do you agree with the principle that iGrow can claim copyright over seeds? I thought you'd be on the side of farmers...

SCIENTIST

I don't think it's that simple.
iGrow set a goal to double crop yields in South Africa by 2030.
(*pointing to her seedlings*) These are drought tolerant soybeans.
My whole research program wouldn't be possible without their backing.

DAVID

So you do work for them?

SCIENTIST

No no. I work for the university.
But what I'm saying is I don't think they're all bad. They don't want the world to starve.

JESSIE

The world? What about us? We can't even afford orange juice because of this lawsuit.

SCIENTIST

I'm sorry that's happening to you. I really am.
But I'm talking about the bigger picture.

DAVID

(mumbling)
"The bigger picture"

SCIENTIST

You know, by 2050 the population of the world will be almost 10 billion?

JESSIE

No...

SCIENTIST

That's 3 billion more mouths to feed than we have today. And with climate change on top of that... We need these new technologies to save lives.

JESSIE

Did you just call seeds a "technology"?

SCIENTIST

I did. They are.

DAVID scoffs.

SCIENTIST (Cont'd)

Food security is one of the biggest challenges of the next 50 years. People will die without these kinds of advances. You seem really sharp, Jessie. You could do really well in the agronomy program here.

JESSIE

I could?

SCIENTIST

Yeah.

JESSIE

But it's the whole idea that this company can claim a patent on their "technology." Patents are for inventions. Seeds already existed since the beginning of time. Next thing you know someone's going to patent the air we breathe.

SCIENTIST

I understand your concern.

JESSIE

But you don't agree? I thought you were-
I don't know. I thought you would be on our side.

SCIENTIST

Like I said, I don't think it's that simple.
Patents are an important incentive for science and innovation.

JESSIE sighs.

JESSIE

Come on Dad.

JESSIE starts to leave. DAVID follows.

DAVID

Thanks for your time, Dr. Khumalo.

SCIENTIST

It isn't just about seeds, you know?

JESSIE and DAVID stop and turn.

SCIENTIST

It's about everything that uses self-replicating technology.

JESSIE

What? Self-replicating what? You mean like everything that reproduces?
That seems like-

SCIENTIST

Yes. I've heard about cases like yours. I think it's terrible. I really do.
But it's about the precedent it would set if iGrow loses. If they can't maintain patents for the research and innovation they fund, then every other company that does something similar is also at risk of losing... we're talking about trillions of dollars in intellectual property.

DAVID

Intellectual property?!
They're seeds!

SCIENTIST

You're still missing the point. Do you like vaccines?

DAVID

...what? What does that have to do with anything?

SCIENTIST

If you don't mind my asking, did you vaccinate Jessie as a child?

DAVID

Of course.

SCIENTIST

Vaccine development uses DNA sequencing - it's a self-replicating technology.
And you're a farmer so you must be noticing the changing climate, no? Biofuels are going to help us move away from mining for oil and coal. That research also uses self-replicating technology. Even software. Do you have a computer? Machine learning... It's all/

JESSIE

/self-replicating technology.

SCIENTIST

Yes. So if these iGrow seed patents don't hold up, if companies can't make money on these products, then there's no incentive for funding all this research.

JESSIE

I thought you cared about feeding the world.

SCIENTIST

I do.

JESSIE

Sounds like all you care about is the money.

SCIENTIST

Of course I care about money.

I come from a country where 50% of our people live in poverty. And the global south is already disproportionately suffering the effects of climate change.

I want to help feed my people. iGrow is going to help me do that.

And their business model which funds my research depends on seed patents. So...

DAVID

How long before iGrow comes after small farmers in Africa?

SCIENTIST

They won't have a problem if they don't violate the patents.

DAVID

That's my point: neither did we.

And they're after us anyway.

Lights shift.

17. The center of the earth

Beneath the ground, the SOIL hums and the minerals flicker. The rocks tremble and a few loosen around the MINER.

She tries to escape but can't. She settles back into the earth's embrace.

MINER

(without needing the radio) Little bean? Are you still there?

SEED

Yeah I'm here. Are you ok?

MINER

Yes. I'm... ok. I'm ok.

...

I want to tell you a story.
I don't know how much longer I'll...

The SEED snuggles into the SOIL and yawns.

SEED

Ok, I'm ready! I'm listening.

MINER

I need you to remember this story.
And one day I need you to tell it to someone.

SEED

Ok I'll listen hard so I can get the words right.

MINER

Tell it even if you don't remember all the words.

SEED

Ok.

MINER

When I was little I used to sneak out of the house just before dawn
And run down to the stream.
I used to put my bare feet in the water to feel its chill tingle through my legs.
It was the only time of day that it was quiet.
Even the mine machines were still asleep.
I used to look at my brown feet in the brown mud
And the water passing over, making its way toward the sea.
I've never seen the ocean.

SEED

I could hear it outside when I was under the bright fluorescent lights in San Francisco!
It sounded very big.

MINER

I think it is.
I think it is...
There was a time every summer when the skies would flood with soft white wings.
A kind of butterfly making its annual migration across the continent,
From the Kalahari Desert to the marshes of Mozambique.
I used to wait for those days every year

When the butterflies would visit,
And imagine myself making the journey with them.
What wonders must they see?
What freedom?
On those mornings, I would wash the mud from my feet
And run through the tall grasses back to my home.
And my grandmother was always in the kitchen.
She'd smile and ask me
"What did you pay attention to this morning?"
And I never understood why she asked me this,
over and over
"What did you pay attention to?"

SEED

Why did she ask?

MINER

I think because
Attention
is... prayer.

SEED

Oh.. it is?

MINER

Yeah, little bean.
The soft mud, the cool water,
Tiny white wings carried on the wind,
The rush of grasses,
The pumping heart inside my chest,
The wrinkle curling around my grandmother's smile.
I came to find out
each one of these was a prayer.

SEED

Hmmm. I like that.
That's a good story.

*The minerals glow brightly. The MINER's
heart glows and she becomes the CENTER
OF THE EARTH.*

SEED

Woah...
Hey! Wait. Where'd you go?
Oh no oh no oh no!

Did you...?

*Something unlocks inside the SEED and they
begin to cry.*

SEED/JESSIE (Cont'd)

Mom? You can't...
It's not fair. I'm not ready. Mom...

THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

It's ok. You'll be ok.

SEED/JESSIE

Mom?
Mom. It's me. Hello?

Silence.

SEED/JESSIE

Mom? I'll remember the story. I'll remember, mom. I'll-

*Then, THE CENTER OF THE EARTH radiates
all around the SEED.*

THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

little bean,
i am the center of the earth and i pull all things toward me
i'm pulling you right now
do you feel that?
did you forget what it feels like?

the key to unlocking the unlucky meaning
of where it all began
the beginning of being
of living
of life which made death
the separation of the two
the beginning of the separation of things

the unlucky locked up feeling of forgetting what being pulled close
by a longed for loved one who made you who you are,
who helped shape you, who has lived many lives like you,
who carries the weight of the ancestors...
did you forget how to notice the gravity of the sensation?

the key to unlocking the unlucky meaning

has been stolen. and now it is lacking.
it is lacking the meaning to unlocking.
they say that the key is the meaning.
they say that the key is the beginning.

but they forgot the feeling
of the living of many lives
of breathing the bones and the dirt and the pulling and pushing of gasses
the exhaling of winds
the migration of stars

they forgot the gravity of the sensation

She reaches for the SEED and just barely touches them. Sunlight pours in through the SOIL from above.

*THE CENTER OF THE EARTH gently disappears.
Lights shift.*

18. Brokenhearted seed

*At the farmhouse, a collection of JESSIE's artworks lie heaped in a pile in front of the tractor. The soybean antfarm and mangled Mr. Lucky are prominent.
A CROW lands on Mr. Lucky and pecks at him.
JESSIE comes out of the house and sees the crow.*

Hey! Shoo!

JESSIE

JESSIE runs at the crow and it flies away.

Come on, man.
You just can't catch a break, can you?
Stupid bird! Eating a man's eyes when he's already down.

JESSIE

*JESSIE puts Mr. Lucky aside, but puts the rest of the artworks under the tractor wheels and gets up into the cockpit.
They turn on the engine.*

Just then the INVESTIGATOR appears.

INVESTIGATOR

Hey, what are you doing with all that?

JESSIE

You!
Dad! DAD!

DAVID

Jessie! What is it?

*DAVID comes running outside with the
shotgun and sees the INVESTIGATOR.*

DAVID (cont'd)

Oh. YOU again?!

*DAVID aims the shotgun at the
INVESTIGATOR, She puts her hands up.*

DAVID (cont'd)

I told you never to come back here!

JESSIE

Oh my god, Dad. What is this? 1956?
Put that thing down.
Dad. Stop it.

DAVID lowers the shotgun.

INVESTIGATOR

Looks like I got here just in time.

JESSIE/DAVID

What?

INVESTIGATOR

Were you trying to destroy the evidence?
You know that's a crime, right?

JESSIE

What are you talking about?

DAVID

What do you want with us?

INVESTIGATOR pulls out a camera and snaps a photo of the pile of artworks.

JESSIE

What are you doing?!

INVESTIGATOR

I heard from the art teacher about how proud she was of some kid with a project that was really saying something.

JESSIE

Huh?

DAVID

The art teacher?

INVESTIGATOR

She said there was a kid making art out of GMO seeds.
I knew it had to be you.
And I-

The INVESTIGATOR spots the antfarm/terrarium and lunges for it.

JESSIE

What are you doing?!

*JESSIE abruptly picks up Mr. Lucky and swings him like a bat, managing to knock the antfarm out of the INVESTIGATOR's hands. It drops the ground and shatters. Dirt and seed spills out.
The minerals beneath the earth begin to pulse.*

DAVID

Nice swing, Jessie.

The INVESTIGATOR snaps another photo.

INVESTIGATOR

You think you can get away with breaking the law?

JESSIE

What law? It's not a crime to make art or destroy it if you want to.

INVESTIGATOR
Did you pay for that iGrow seed?

JESSIE
What?

INVESTIGATOR
The one you used in your “art.”

JESSIE
I found it.

INVESTIGATOR
You found it.

JESSIE
Yeah, I found it by the road.

INVESTIGATOR
So you didn’t pay for it.

JESSIE
Can you hear me?
I found it by the road. There was a whole pile of them, just left there after a truck accident.

INVESTIGATOR
You can’t just-

DAVID
Do you understand what you’re doing?
-what your actions are costing us?
Why are you helping them?

INVESTIGATOR
I’ve got mouths to feed.

DAVID
Why don’t you try growing some food then?

*An impasse. A beat.
JESSIE kicks one of the art pieces and it falls
apart.*

DAVID
Hey! What are you doing? Don’t-

JESSIE

Why? It doesn't matter anymore anyway.

DAVID picks up a piece of JESSIE's artwork.

DAVID

Yes it does.
Jay can't go to the Art Institute of Chicago because of you.

INVESTIGATOR

What? What do you mean?

JESSIE

We had to use my college fund to pay for the lawyer to fight your bosses.

INVESTIGATOR

Oh. That's... a shame.

The INVESTIGATOR notices a piece of JESSIE's artwork on the ground.

INVESTIGATOR (cont'd)

Hey this *is* good.

DAVID

Yeah. It is, isn't it?

JESSIE

Didn't you ever want to *be* something?

INVESTIGATOR

Me?

JESSIE

Yeah. Like.... An astronaut or... a doctor.... Or a famous singer... I don't know.

INVESTIGATOR

I wanted to be a pilot. I wanted to fly.

JESSIE

Yeah. To fly...
And instead you're a private investigator for a giant corporation that goes around suing small farmers for... what? Planting seeds?
We grow food that probably ends up on your dinner table!
I wanted to go to Chicago. I wanted to see the whole world.
I thought if I could-

I thought I was missing out on something, that I was *stuck* here in Indiana. And that the rest of the world was out there just waiting for me to really say something with my *art*.

But you know what, Taylor?

Thank you.

The minerals beneath the ground pulse stronger.

INVESTIGATOR

What?

JESSIE

I was watching that little soybean in the terrarium and I watched the water and the minerals move around. And I got to thinking about all the seeds and growing things beneath our feet. I got to thinking about nitrogen and phosphorus and worms and bacteria.

And then I saw something I've never seen before.

And I realized...

I don't need to go to Chicago.

I don't need art school.

There's a whole universe right underneath us.

No one owns it. No one invented it.

It's the whole world.

DAVID puts his arm around JESSIE.

INVESTIGATOR

That's a... beautiful story...

But this isn't over.

The INVESTIGATOR smiles menacingly.

INVESTIGATOR (cont'd)

We'll see you in court.

JESSIE picks up Mr. Lucky's head and throws it at the INVESTIGATOR. The INVESTIGATOR lets out a squawk, turns into a crow, and flies away.

JESSIE

I knew it!

Lights shift.

19. Soil song

The feeling...
Listen...!

SOIL

Aren't you scared for me?

SEED

I'm here. I'm here.

SOIL

I'm scared...

SEED

I know.

SOIL

*The SEED cracks open
and a sprout pushes its way into the SOIL
and toward the sun.
Lights shift.*

Soybean A498Y34.2035,
You could never lack.

SOIL

Maybe they never taught you the song
In San Francisco.

You could never lack. That is the key.
You don't need to search. You are who you are.

THE CENTER OF THE EARTH
little bean, wherever you are planted
wherever you can feel the song..
you are my remembering.

SOIL
You have crossed the Great Divide,
Felt the pull of the center of the earth.

THE CENTER OF THE EARTH
you are my meaning, the being. my being.
i am your being, the beginning. you are my beginning.
we
are the meaning.

SOIL

And you will split yourself open,
Push yourself up,
And soon
Sooner than you know,
you will feel the warmth of the sun
Drawing you toward it too.

And if you should ever forget,
If you should ever sense that you are lacking,
You will stretch your roots deep,
And deep and deep
And I will help you remember.

Lights shift and focus on the tree. Another gust of wind, an echo of the gumboot dance rhythm, and more petals fall to the earth like snow.

Then, radio static.

RADIO

An update out of South Africa from the Stilfontein mine disaster. 12 workers remain stuck deep under the ground. Search and rescue efforts continue but rescue workers who have been working frantically for what seems like decades say they are not giving up.

Lights shift.

A blink.

A lifetime passes.

The moon completes a cycle.

Soybeans blossom.

Waters flow across the continent and back into the sea.

ACT III: 2064, We Made This

In this transition from Act 2 to Act 3, somehow the space shifts to include the audience into the action. Maybe lights come up slightly. Maybe there's an interactive portion here where audiences are all literally invited to put their hands in soil and plant some seeds.

Now it's 2064 and we're in a community garden in rural Indiana. Global sea levels have risen, droughts across the Great Plains

are frequent, and inland flooding is a risk for most of the Wabash river valley.

JESSIE, now in their 70s, enters singing/humming. They have fully blossomed in their sense of self as a queer elder. They tend to some seedlings. THE KID enters from the audience sheepishly.

You're late.

JESSIE

THE KID freezes.

You were supposed to be here three hours ago.

JESSIE

THE KID comes to the table with pots of dirt where JESSIE digs their hands in and rubs dirt between their fingers. JESSIE holds their hand out to THE KID.

You're gonna get real comfortable with it.
Might as well start now.
Best way to plant a seed's to do it by hand.

JESSIE

Don't you have shovels or something in the shed?

THE KID

We don't use metal trowels here.
You gotta take care when you're planting.
The job requires a kind of... tenderness.

JESSIE

Uhh..

THE KID

THE KID drops the dirt in their hand.

You'll put your hands into the soil like this and/

JESSIE

JESSIE scoops a little bed out for a seed.

The way I think about it, what you're tryin' to do here is shape a little bed.

JESSIE

Almost womb-like.

THE KID freezes and then loses it.

JESSIE

Don't laugh. It's / true

THE KID

Did you say "womb"-like?
You mean like a...

THE KID gestures a "womb" and cracks up all over again. JESSIE is not amused.

THE KID (cont'd)

Is this some kind of /

JESSIE

Some kind of place where you're gonna get another chance to do right.
Yeah, it is.
And you need that more than I do.
So stop laughing and look here.

*THE KID abruptly stops laughing.
JESSIE stares at them waiting for a reply.*

THE KID

... Sorry...

JESSIE

Now, as I was saying,
you scoop out a bed where your little seed's
gonna do something pretty amazing in just a coupla weeks.
You know what it does?

THE KID

Uh... it grows...?

JESSIE

Complete transformation,
splits itself open and bursts up into new life.
So you got to make sure you make a nice little home for it to do its work.

THE KID

Right...

THE KID is skeptical.

JESSIE
You want to try?

THE KID
You got gloves?

JESSIE
Nope.

THE KID
Look, I came here to do a job and the recovery placement agent said this place was really special or something.
But we're out here talking about "wombs" and shit,
And you don't even have gloves or shovels?
What kind of farm is this?
How am I supposed / to -

JESSIE
/ Defeats the purpose.

THE KID
What does?

JESSIE
Gloves.

THE KID
What do you mean defeats the purpose?

JESSIE
You'll figure it out. Come here and look.

*THE KID doesn't get it.
JESSIE retrieves a jar of seeds from the shed
and takes one out gently.*

JESSIE (cont'd)
Now, see this seed right here?

*JESSIE holds out their palm, cradling a seed
in the center. JESSIE might caress it with a
finger.*

This is a heritage seed.

We're the only farm in the whole Wabash Valley that's got em.

THE KID

A heritage seed?

JESSIE

Yeah, it ain't one of them poor brokenhearted iGrow GMO seeds that don't even know who they are anymore.

Can you imagine?

THE KID

Huh?

JESSIE

Those iGrow seeds, they make them in labs with synthetic chemicals and fluorescent lights, so those poor seeds come into the world not knowing where they came from.

THE KID

What are you talking about?

JESSIE

iGrow seeds. It's something like 95% of the seeds you can get at the store, they come from these big seed factories in San Francisco.

THE KID

So... where else would they come from?

JESSIE

They got no relationship with the minerals and waters of a place, no history...
And they get shipped across the continent and placed in the ground somewhere,
And don't you think they must be terrified...?
You know, the soil takes care of them the best she can. She's kind like that.
But... can you imagine?
Those brokenhearted little seeds must be so lonely and afraid.
I think they know they're missing something.
How could they know what they're missing is the songs of the earth?
I think about that a lot.

But this seed here. Now,
this seed's part of a line that's been cared for, tended to, passed down.
Her great grandmother seed and her great grandmother seed before that
knew these Wabash plains and their stories.
They witnessed all the changes in the soil, subtle and quick.
Learned how to adapt.
They know the language rhythms of the underground bacteria and fungi.
They know the call of meadowlarks and the angle of the hot September sun.

THE KID

Are you a poet or something?

JESSIE

(tickled) Kind of. Maybe. I used to want to be an artist.
Guess I became one anyway, huh?
Look here. This seed's got everything it needs to make a whole plant
All bundled up inside itself. In this tiny little body...
immeasurable possibility.
Just needs some good strong earth, a little fresh water, some sun
And some tenderness.
You care for the seed, and it'll care for you in return.
They're generous with themselves that way.

JESSIE plants the seed through this next bit, demonstrating. Is this when the audience gets seeds distributed to them? Throughout the rest, JESSIE walks around the audience and coaches people on how to plant and care for seeds.

JESSIE

Here, look, you put the seed in its bed, cover it gently, like you're tucking it in.
Give it a little fresh water, and then pat it into place.
Uh huh. That's good.
Maybe you wanna whisper it a little prayer of gratitude,
And then you do the next one.

THE KID

Prayer?

JESSIE

If you've never done it this way before,
it's kind of like learning a new language. But you'll get it.
You learn to get good at listening, and... a different kind of attention.
You know, I heard this once: "attention is prayer."
And, I think that's right.

There's so many distractions, so many worries these days.
Believe me, I know.
I was around back in 2035 for the first flood,
And every one since.
Before Indiana folks knew the meaning of the words "inland flooding"
It didn't used to be like this. We used to-
I know what it's like to suddenly lose everything you thought you needed to be safe.

I know how hard it can be to stay hopeful.

That's good.

And I also know that where you pay attention,

I mean real attention,

The kind where you open your heart and your senses,

tune into the sensations on your skin

and the shapes, and colors, and all that dances before you,

when you listen and receive...

You start to know the world in a different way,

you learn its way of speaking,

and the secrets it has to teach us

about wholeness,

about relationship,

about time.

If JESSIE has wandered through the audience, they now go back to the table with THE KID.

JESSIE

You come to find that your very heart is a seed,

Filled with immeasurable possibility,

Planted right there in the middle of your chest.

It has everything it needs, inside and all around it.

And the only thing it really longs for

is a little tenderness.

*Lights focus on JESSIE and THE KID. THE KID stretches their hand out. JESSIE hands THE KID another heritage seed.
Blackout.*

END OF PERFORMANCE

Author's Statement

This project needs a production process. It has had multiple workshop readings: one with professional actors, one with farmers, and one with university students. I'm hungry for designers and a production team to help me understand the visual and rhythmic world of the project. The elements I have most questions about are related to the audience experience of the world of the play, including the visual art installation and the invitation to plant actual seeds during the final act. I also want to understand more about the way rhythm, dance, and sound work in the piece in terms of pacing and tension. My hope is that after a world premiere, this project could be built to tour throughout the midwest and enliven partnerships with food justice workers and community farmers.