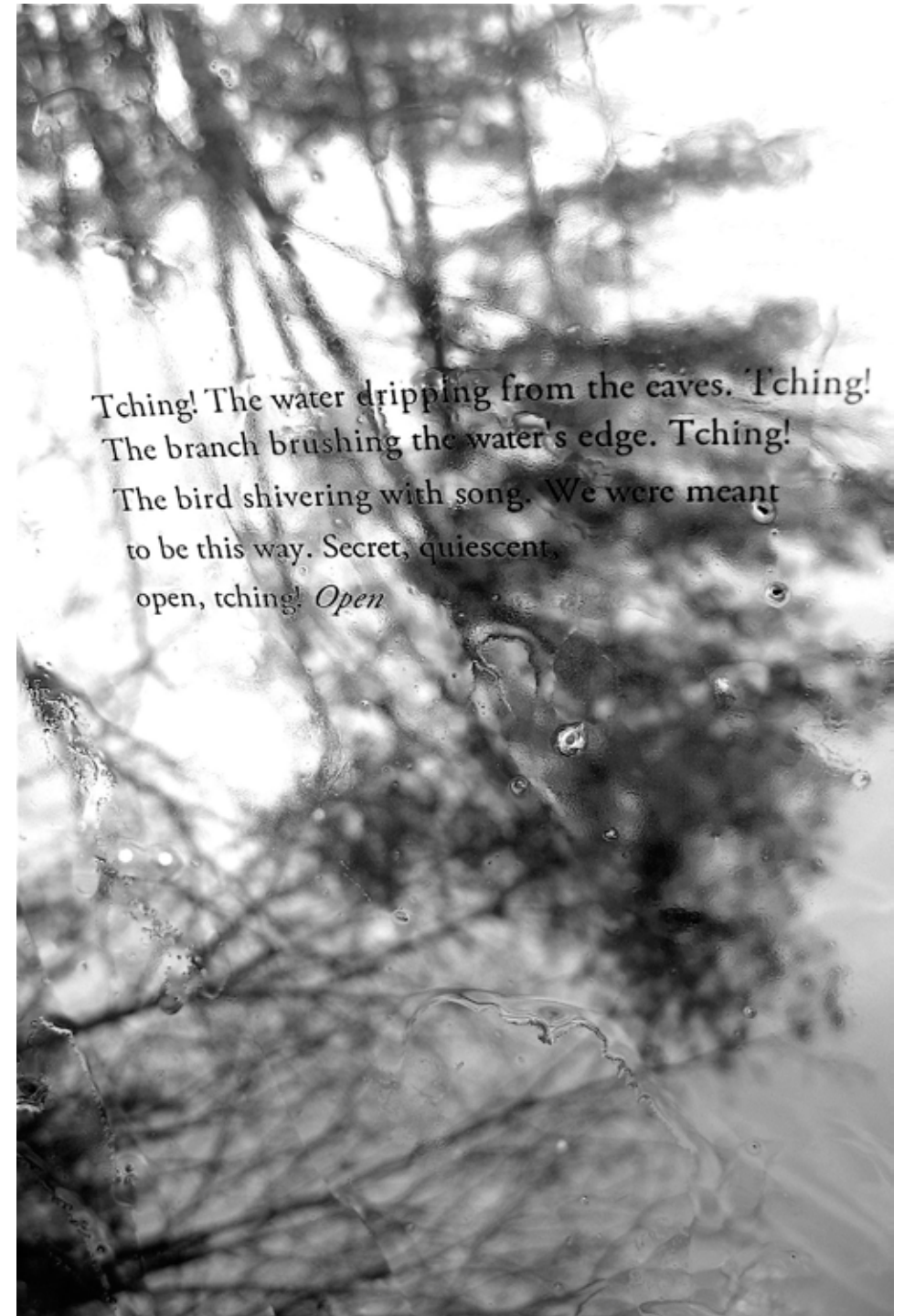


BRANDYWINE

The gold field spreads out from the river like a dusty wing. The air is dry and hot. It could be August—but it's March. We are out walking, the whole family, single file along paths that were impassable when we first came here late last July. Then, the river banks were covered with vines, thistles, briars, such a weight of green we all stopped fighting anything but thorns and heat and humidity so high it was like living inside a mouth. Today we all walk silently. It's as if we've reached a clearing inside ourselves where there is exactly what stretches out before us: to the right, a field gold with dead grasses, to the left a wide, slow-moving river. Around our feet, red-winged beetles flutter up, drift to rest on the bent grasses, the few new leaves. We round a bend in the river and see two canoes drifting sideways to the current. Nosing close to the bank, they buffet each other. They are both filled with men. There is loud talk, laughter, among them. They are probably drunk. They are all young. "What's happening?" they ask me. They assume we are alone, my son and I. Even when you pass them, five minutes later, I'm not sure they will connect us, we seem so separate. This is accurate as the day is accurate, and for a moment painless as an unbaited hook scraping again and again the river's quivering flank.



Tching! The water dripping from the caves. Tching!
The branch brushing the water's edge. Tching!
The bird shivering with song. We were meant
to be this way. Secret, quiescent,
open, tching! *Open*