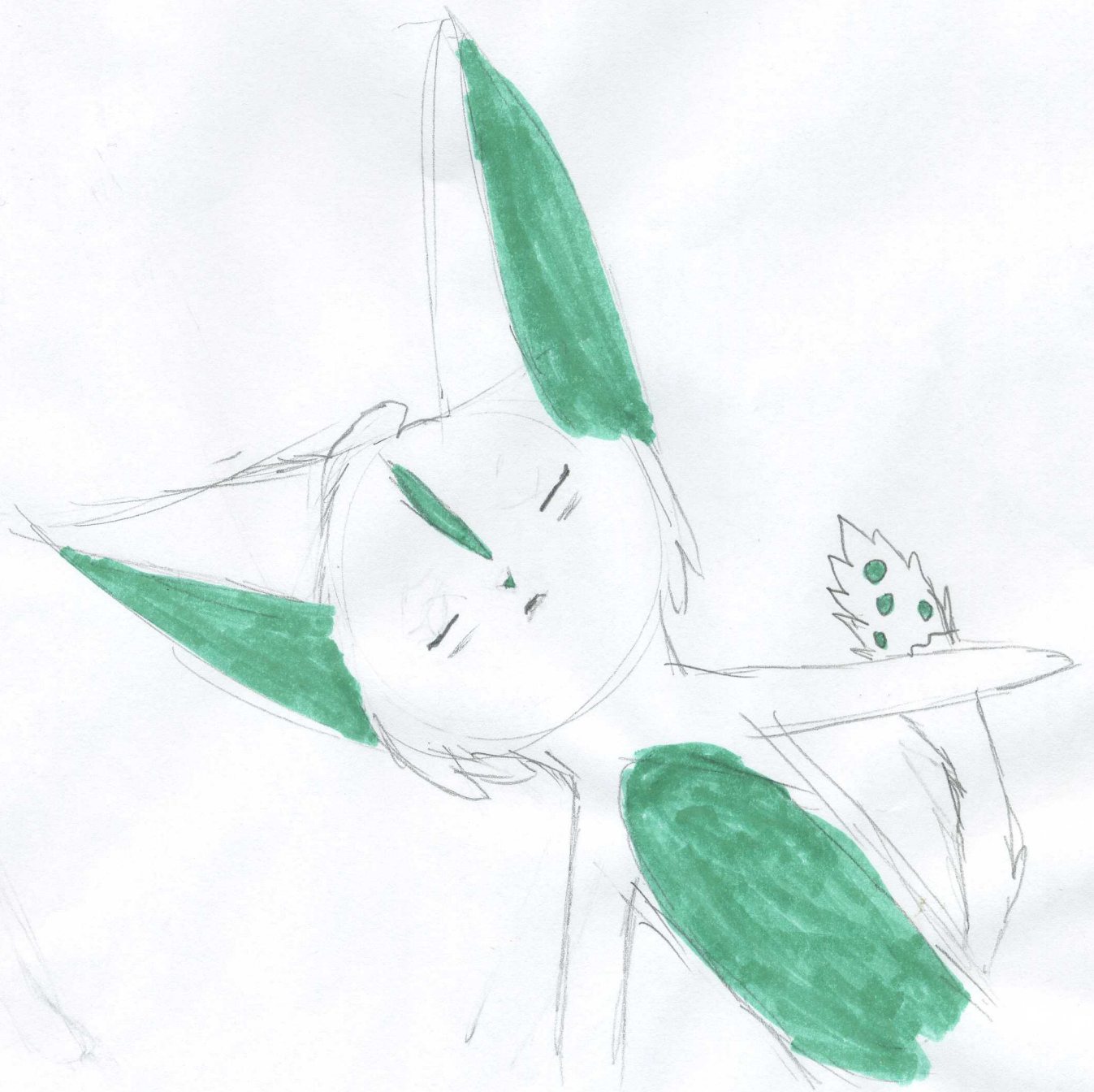


# Ash AND THE Spirits



VOLUME ONE: THE BATTLE FOR LUWA





"Aspen!" I yell frantically. "ASPEN! COME HERE!" My sister, Aspen, rushes over to me and sees our mother, Luna, lying on the ground, chest barely moving. "You know how to do stuff with herbs, something!" I say. "No! I don't!" Aspen says. "I can't do anything!" "Neither can I!" I say.





Luna's eyes flutter open for long enough to see us. "Ash...Aspen..." but then, her eyes close again, never to be opened again. "Luna! NO!" I yell, putting my small paws on her chest. "LUNA!!!! COME BACK!!!!!! NO!!!!!!" My eyes start to get wet. "There's nothing we can do," says Aspen softly. "She won't wake up." I lower my head and walk away.





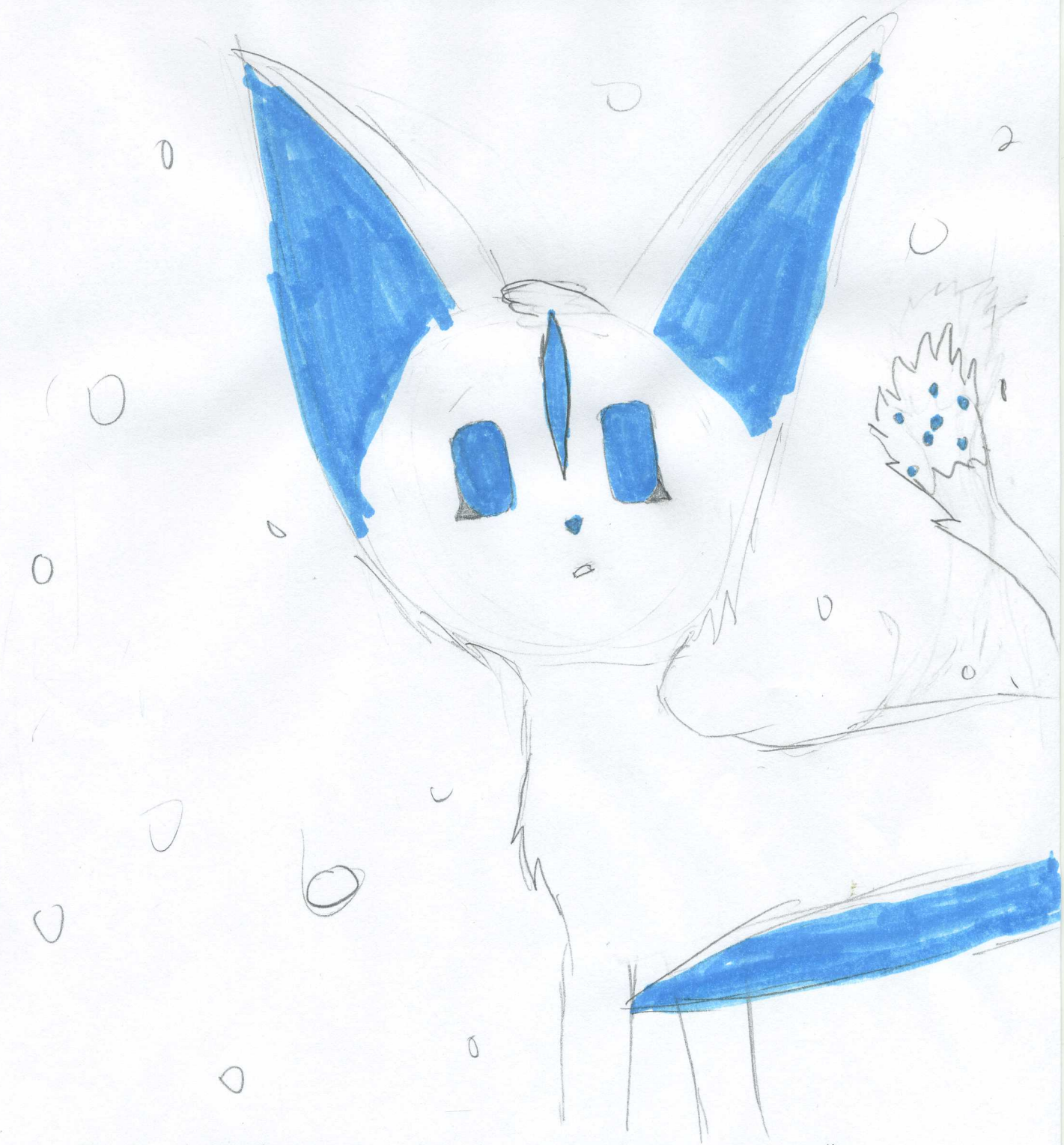
I walk very slowly to the tallest hill, where I always go to see the sun set and rise. Now, the sun setting was like a closing door, darkening the world. I sit down and feel tears in my eyes.





I stand up and look into the sky, dotted with stars.





The Spirits float down from the stars and onto the mountain. "You will always be safe," a gentle voice says. And as they start to fade away, Luna opens her mouth. "I'll always be with you."





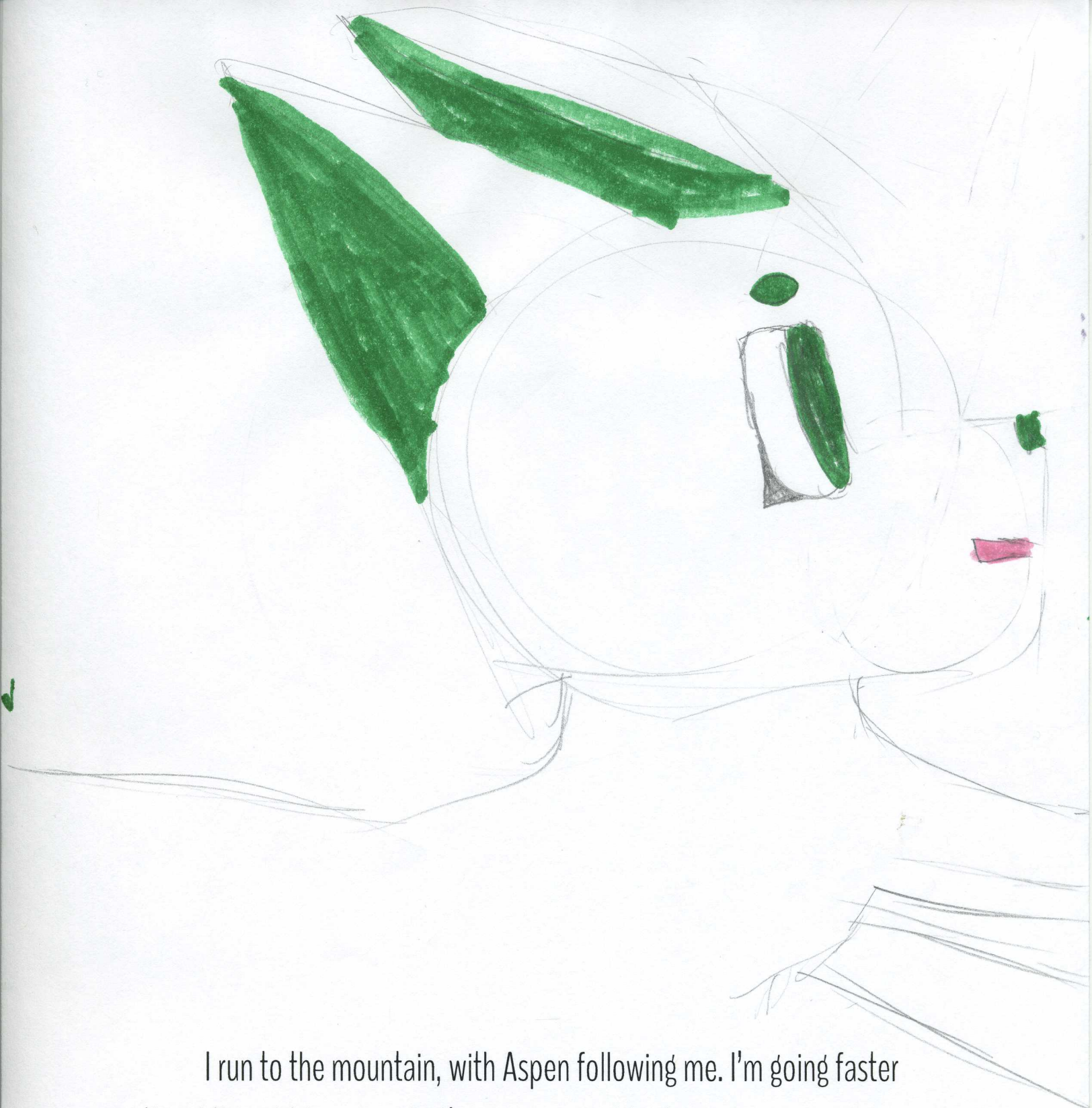
"NO!" I yell, pushing with all of my strength off of the ledge, desperately trying to reach Luna. "I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU LEAVE AGAIN!!!" Her tail hangs just in my reach, but fades away right before I can touch it. I fall to the ground. But as I do, I don't scream. I'm not scared. I know that if I die, I'll go up with Luna.





When I hit the ground, it doesn't hurt. I get up immediately and rush to the hollow. I skid to a stop when I see Aspen looking over Luna's body. "We have to go find Luna!" I say. "She's still here!" "She is?" Aspen says, eyes wide. "Yes! We have to go! Now!"





I run to the mountain, with Aspen following me. I'm going faster than I thought I ever could. I'm going so fast that even Aspen, who has longer legs than me, has a hard time keeping up.





As I bound up the mountain, I don't slow down. The cold wind blows into my face. When I'm halfway up, I'm not even panting.



YOU CAN  
SAVE HER

...

If you can reach  
her

I see the Spirits that haven't taken shape yet. Then I hear a soft voice in my head. "You can save her if you can reach her." A rush of courage runs through me.

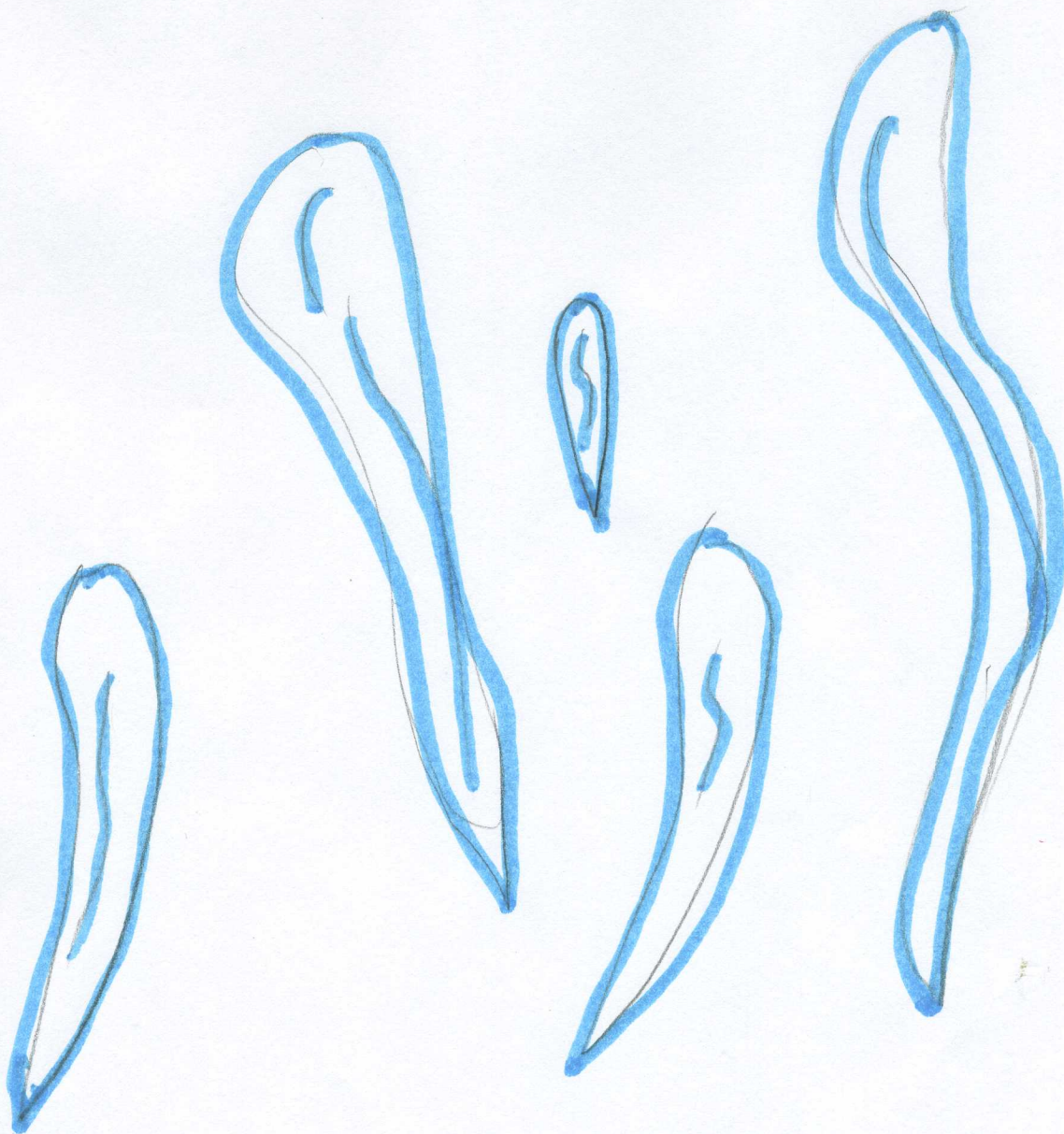




I jump.

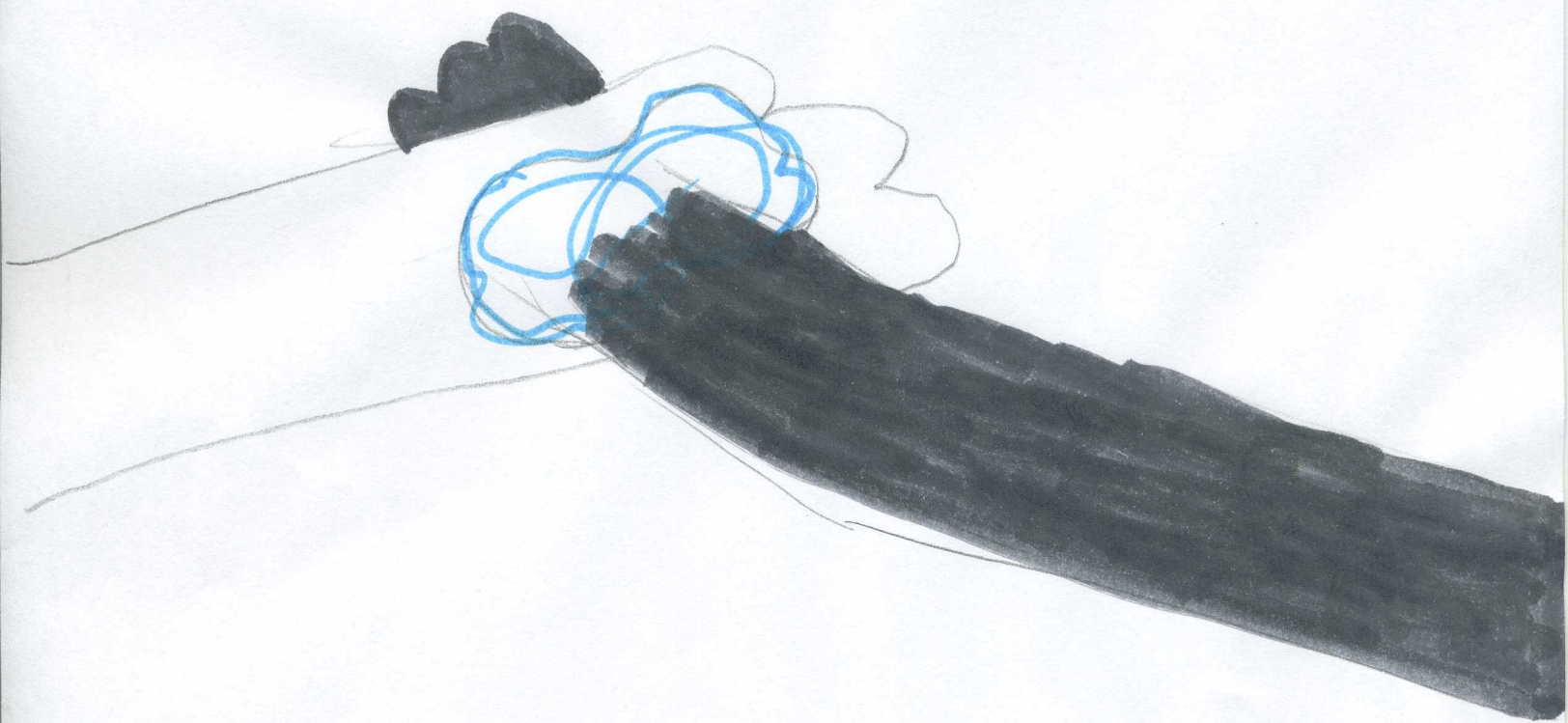
I fly.





Then I lose the courage for one second, and I fall, but I see the spirits plummeting down towards me. They stop when they reach me and they pick me up and carry me up to the clouds where they take shape. Aspen lands next to me.





"Luna!" I say, and I run up to her. But my paws go right through her.  
"Why can't I touch you?!" "I'm a Spirit now, Ash," she says. "You can't  
touch a Spirit."

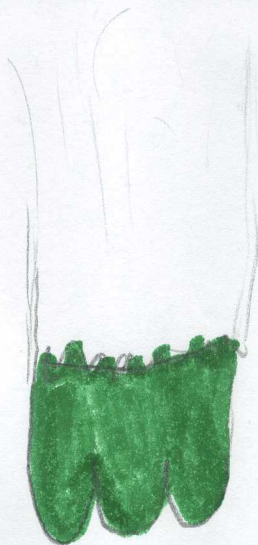


I jump off. When I land this time, it hurts, but I don't care. I go as fast as I can over to the hollow. I grab Luna's body by the scruff and rush back to the mountain. I get to the top and fly up to the cloud. I leap over to Luna's spirit and throw her body over her. I thought it would work. But it didn't. Her body fell through the cloud. "Luna," I wailed, "come back, please!" The spirits fade away. "NO! LUNA!"

I fall down to the mountain. I walk back to the hollow, but on my way, I see Luna's body. I go over to her. Her eyes blink open. "Luna!" I say. "Ash!" Luna says. She stands. I press my flank against her and we walk back to the hollow together.

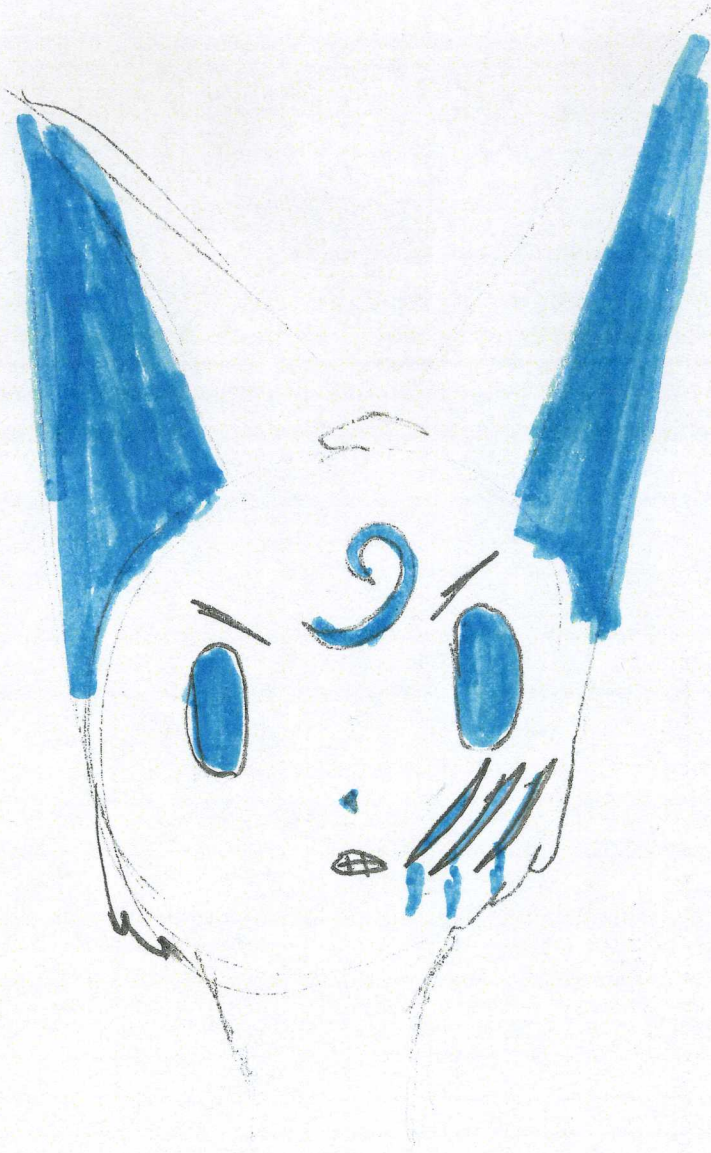
"Wait... where's Aspen?" Luna asks. "I don't know," I reply. "Oh no," says Luna. "What?" I ask. "The Spirits say that they will take any live creature that stays with them for too long," Luna says. "She must be too scared to jump!" I say. "We have to go save her!" I jump up and run to the top of the mountain. Luna comes right behind me.





I can see Aspen's fading paws reaching out, her trying to jump away. I leap into the air and shoot into the sky. I grab Aspen's paw and pull her off of the cloud and down to the mountain.





Every night, we go up to the mountain and fight the Spirits for the safety of all of the creatures in the forest. We keep the forest safe. And we'll keep it that way.

THE END