ALDRIC ULEP

How to Agkayas

Agkayastan, my mother says, let’s pare the moringa pods.

She begins with an armored colander of freshly rinsed drumsticks:
a spray of jade twigs—skinny snake gourds, thickened asparagus.

She presses a drumstick against her forearm.
Starting from her wrist, she angles her knife into the valley of a ridge. It slides
along her arm’s length
shaving strips of green skin
off. Chartreuse flesh. This severing repeats
until the winged seeds spill like marbles,
translucent green, the faint scent of peanuts.

Agkayas. This verb is unique to this action, this fruit.
I ask if there’s anything else that can be agkayan.
She doesn’t know. Overhearing, Grandma calls out,
Awanen ti agikayasan, she says, there’s nothing left
to be stripped. She teaches me this gesture,
how to face the blade.