Hunting Down Dinner on Highway 13

Stomach's rumbling like the muffler
on the rusted-out pickup in my rear view mirror
when against the setting sun, I see
The Beefmaster Café--
That's what the sign says framed
with red and white light bulbs
neon footnotes flash "Hickory Smoked
Hickory Smoked
Hickory Smoked"

Inside, ceiling fans twirl counter-clockwise
as flies fly clockwise around the counter.

He's the Beefmaster,
with a past as checkered as the tablecloths.
Been here since the farm folded—
don't know why.
He stands maybe 6'2" in his white apron.
"Ya'll kin eat outsod. We got music out thar,"
he boasts as the radio's tin jingle jangles
spill from windows
while he strolls from table to table
and flies buzz in and out.

Mrs. Beefmaster, dressed in nurse-blue polyester hollers,
"Getcha anythang?" as she stands behind
the $3.99 deep-fried
chicken dinner buffet,
turning over corn, carrots,
black-eyed peas that lost their bubble
and mashed potatoes rose fresh on
Beefmaster's brother's Texas farm
while flies dive from bin to bin.

Junior Beefmaster
looks as if someone squeezed his head
from top to bottom.
He collects unmatched dishes,
grabs change
brushes crumbs to the floor
as he moves from table to table
while the flies circle him.

And I move, to the cash register
where a 4, 2 and 7 pop up
like stale toast,
toss a 5
while flies lead me out
the dirty screen door.

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