

Fish Leslie

"Sam Jones"

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Now I met Sam Jones on dock-side night in a run down
viking bar,

A kid of maybe fifteen years at that purely nowhere
star.

He had no ship, he had no skills,

No name or family,

And he looked at me like a thirsty soul at a boundless
salty sea.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

"Captain take me with you Captain I'll work for free,

I was spacer born and stranded here

Dock-side's not for me."

Now that tale sure is an old one

Some stationer unwise,

Had slept with some spacer love and got herself this
prize.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

And the kid grows up all restless and dreams of fairing
free,

The stars and worlds and foren docks and things he'll
never see.

"A Spacer's more then born" I said,

"He's trained from infancy.

And you, you've grown up station-side boy you're no

use to me."

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

Well I saw him take that hope of his and turn his face
away,

Not give up, no he'd never quit just try further down the
way.

"Hey kid," I said "you're stubborn,"

"If you work with half that will,

Well our engineer could use a hand we've got a berth
to fill."

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

He stood there with that scowling look as if he hadn't
heard,

And then the tears ran down his face but he didn't say
a word.

Now he never was much for talkin'

After we took him on board,

Yes Sir, yes Ma'am, no Sir were all the words he'd
afford.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

Now the engineer Kate Meachum,

Well her eyes were going bad.

She knew I knew and that kid I sent drove old Kate
raving mad,

"Out" she'd yell.

And he'd lie low until old Kate got cool,

Then back he'd go and he'd do the skut, while Kate
would called him a fool.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

In time Kate's eyes got much worse, and every

crewman knew,

But Kate herself, well her heart would stop the day she
left that crew.

That close-mouthed would never talk,

He just covered Kate's mistakes.

"Kate,"

He'd say "Check the number four"

Or "Kate that's nine-point-eight."

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

Now we made our rounds on the ports we used from
Halleys to almar,

And one jump all of our luck ran out at a little K-class
star.

We hit a rock,

A vein went down.

The ship went kiting through,

No way to stop and no damn thing that a rescue ship
could do.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

"It's the number three bar" Kate Meachum said,

"That's broken on that vein."

"I'll send a man up," I said then,

First hope I'd entertained.

"No way," said Kate "It's outside work, we can't fix that
from here,

And to pull that thing with an high-V charge is the job
for the engineer."

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

Now we rode in dust at three quarters sea with our

shields all down and null,

"Kate" I said "It's hell out there, dust is chewing up our hull."

"It'll chew a hardsuit faster still,

Ten minutes is all you'll last,"

"Die now or later" Old Kate said, "I'll just work a little fast."

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

Well Old Kate put that hardsuit on,

She went out in the driving hail.

Of IV gas that scoured our hull,

with the shriek of a banshee wail.

Her voice came back so thin and weak that we could hardly hear,

"I'm on it now, I'm at the vein," I've got the cover clear.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

And silence then a long long while all drowned in static hiss,

"Damn this thing, my face plate's fogged my sight's gone all to mist."

"Kate" I said "Get back inside someone else will go,"

But then I heard that aft-lock work two levels down below.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

"Steady, Kate." said the kid's low voice then while the minutes ran,

"Easy Kate, my suit's brand new keep low as ever you can.

I'll find the pins, you tell me how and I'll get this bastard free,"

Kate's voice then, we listened hard but about one word
in three.

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

"Ten minutes gone," we heard Kate say.

Then we heard the kid's hard breath,

"I got her, shove the other in hold on for life and
death."

Said the kid, "My arm's gone numb"

"Oh that's it now there, Kate, she's in"

"Get inside fast, get outta here" he went to static then

For Space is wide and good friends are too few.

"Boy hang on" we heard Kate say,

Then we heard Kate Meachum swear.

And quiet then,

just the static hiss and the stillness in the air.

Ten minutes more "Power up" I said

For we heard no sound back there,

It was my hand shoved the lever home and the power
surged and flaired.

For space is wide and good friends are to few.

Our speed ebbed down and ebbed again,

As we turned for that K-class sun.

But Kate and the kid went on together on the trip they'd
both begun,

Old half blind Kate and young Sam Jones made a hell
of an engineer

So turn down a glass for such as they

And thank god we're sitting here.

For space is wide and good friends are to few.

Yes space is wide and good friends are to few.

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