This one has teeth. Album number six from This Is The Kit is named after their song “Careful of Your Keepers,” and while the keepers might have chompers of their own (they usually do), the first baring of squirrelly whites happens in the opening number, the song that the album was *almost* named after, "Goodbye Bite.”

Now why the hell would we dwell on almosts? Because Kate Stables’ strength as a songwriter welcomes you into the world of mistakes and mishaps, cruel circumstances and universe-driven surprises. It’s not about making lemonade out of lemons. Just pick up a lemon and chew. Save yourself the trouble of all that lemonade business.

“A 'how shit is this' measuring stick?” sings Stables on “Goodbye Bite.” A practical problem, defined succinctly, yet a few moments later the melody carries the words “wish bone broke / dancing death / people left.” The ability to pulse swiftly from cryptic poetry to honest inquisition is a signature move of the Paris-based, UK born bandleader, in the same way that The Undertaker’s signature move was the 'tombstone piledriver.’ And like being slammed headfirst into the mat, there’s a sting to This Is The Kit’s lyrical confrontations. They’re forever sharp, like canines, perhaps the very same that do the chewing in song number two, “Inside Outside."

On this record the music is daring and soft, cutting and warm, a wild feat of complexity and combined dispositions. Stables is joined by her stalwart band of not-sick-of-eachother-yet Brits: Rozi Leyden, Neil Smith & Jamie Whitby-Coles, plus additional arrangements and extra-curricular instruments from Jesse Vernon. There’s a shared language of their family experience that is as audible as ever in these recordings, boasting beautiful instrumental performances that still leave the nuanced shape of space required for the human voice to live at the forefront of the songs. Having a shared language and a supportive environment is a pillar of survival, and making anything new and striking in a modern age as disappointing as this one is as good a survival mechanism as any.

Surviving change is a constant throughout this record. We are taken to the front lines in the song “More Change,” where we can celebrate the losing battle of fighting change, celebrating it with the barbed dancing lyrics that whisk us from the mundane to the massive: “light bulb / life changing / found a friend…claw sanity back again.”

Guiding the ship through changing seas is producer Gruff Rhys (Super Furry Animals). Stables described Rhys’ role as being a “tonesetter,” watchful and attentive to the band dynamics while making sure to always follow a hunch for where a new sound could find its place in the recording. One noted sonic MVP is a distorted vibraphone. Hear the instrument in the title track with its upper harmonics crunched, transients smashed, a sound that is otherwise pure getting gnawed at until the grime matches the warning of the words to be careful of your keepers.

Rhys also acted as scribe, dutifully maintaining a “conversation log” gathering tiny chunks of wisdom and novelty from the constant talking that goes hand in hand with losing ones’ minds in a recording studio. Tacking the madness onto the bulletin board sets the tone indeed, almost to prove “if we’ve said all this, who says we can’t make a brilliant record too."

The brilliance comes back to the bite. “Stuck In A Room” plants the listener in the most familiar of recent quandaries, wanting to leave but being unable to. There are so many versions of “leaving” one might be attracted to in this disappointing modern age, and Stables works through them all. The mystery of just what the trouble is should be appreciated, because then the pain can be shared. We aren’t just gawking at a songwriter having a specific bad day. We’re in the room too. But the song moves with a quickness, Stables’ singing leading the beat to an uncertain march ahead, implying that we will get out eventually, albeit with some tooth-marks in the skin. Call it a souvenir. Call it a mistake to learn from. Just don’t call it late for dinner.

By the final song “Dibs,” we’re nearly chewed through. I won’t spoil the ending, but it’s got it all. There's drama and excitement, an urgency and a proper pleading. There’s comfort and repetition. And comfort and repetition. Repetition, too. Doesn’t that just about sum up life on Earth? Conflict hits hard and with surprise, but have the right people around you and you can escape by the skin of your teeth. No better people to do that with than This Is The Kit. Now finish your lemons, they’re getting cold.

Adam Schatz