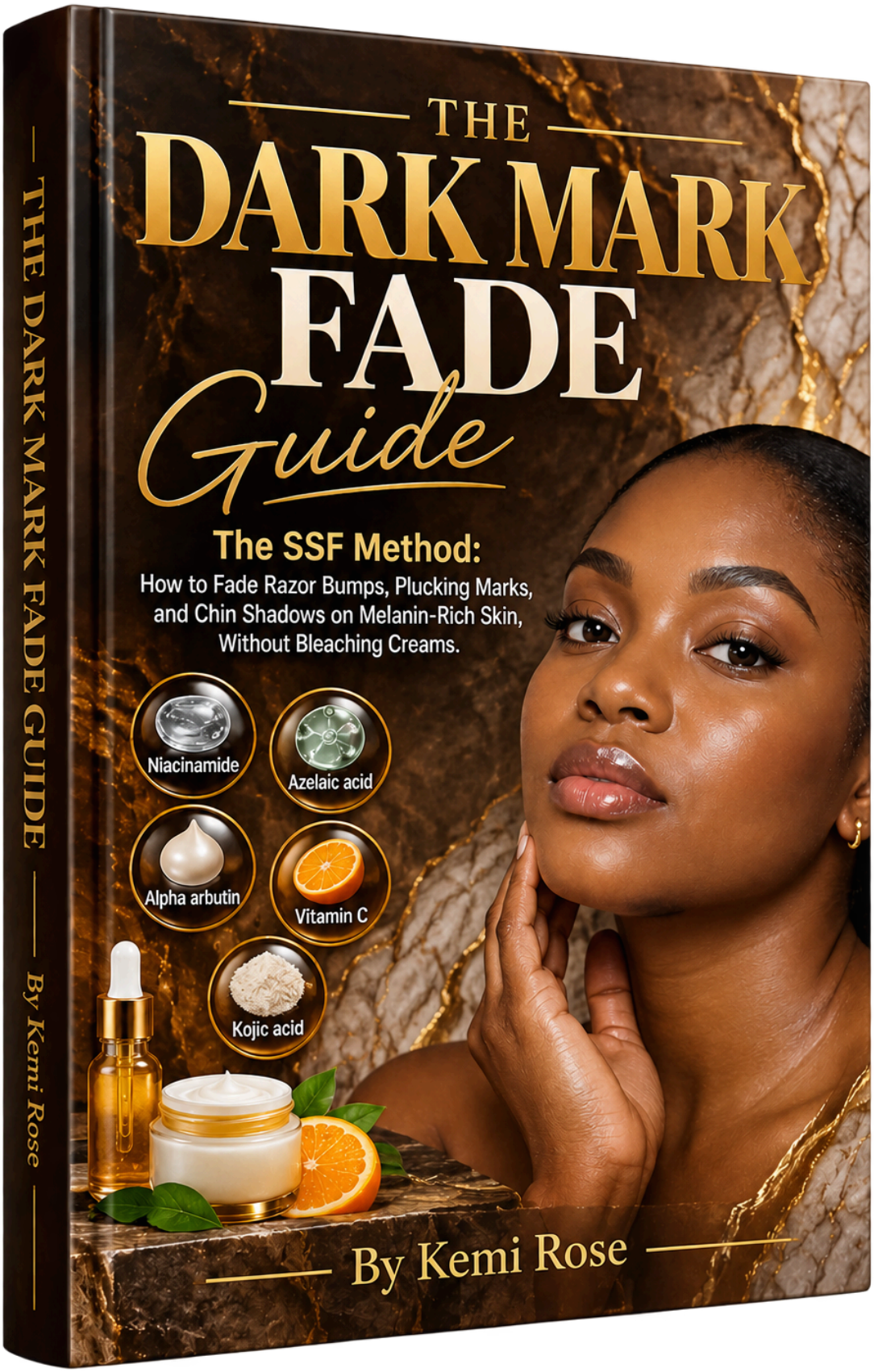

THE
DARK MARK
FADE
Guide
The SSF Method:
How to Fade Razor Bumps, Plucking Marks, and Chin Shadows on Melanin-Rich Skin, Without Bleaching Creams.
Niacinamide
Azelaic acid
Alpha arbutin
Vitamin C
Kojic acid
By Kemi Rose
THE DARK MARK FADE GUIDE
By Kemi Rose

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Introduction
The Mark I Thought Was Part of Me

Let me ask you something, my sister.

When you look at your chin in the mirror, what do you see first? The hair? Or the dark patch that sits there even on days you haven't touched a razor?

For years, I saw the patch.

I called it my "chin shadow." I told myself it was how my skin was made. Some people have a dark neck, some have dark knees, and I had a dark chin. That's what I believed.

I was wrong. That patch was not part of me. It was a record of everything I had done to my skin: every pluck, every pick, every burning cream, every angry scrub. And records can be changed.

If you've read my main guide, Never Again: The Morning Mirror Check, you already know the basics. You know why I told you to stop picking, to wear sunscreen, and to be careful with creams. That guide gave you the foundation.

This bonus goes deeper. It's only about the marks.

Here's what I'll show you. I call it The SSF Method, and the letters stand for Stop, Shield, Fade. First, you stop making new marks. Then you shield your skin from the sun, which keeps darkening what's already there. And only then do you fade the old marks, slowly and safely.

Most women do these in the wrong order. They jump straight to the fading cream. That's like mopping the floor while the tap is still running.

I also have to be honest with you. Dark marks are slow. I'm not going to promise you smooth skin in seven days. Anyone who does is selling you hope in a jar. But with patience, many women see real improvement in 8 to 12 weeks, and I'll show you exactly what to do each week.

I'm not a doctor, and I'll tell you plainly when something needs a doctor or a pharmacist.

Come, let's start with the chin that doesn't match your face.

Chapter 1
The Chin That Doesn't Match Your Face

Before we fix anything, I want you to know I understand how this feels. Because the patch can hurt more than the hair ever did.

The Patch You Can't Shave Away

Here's something nobody tells you.

You can remove hair. You can shave it, thread it, or wax it, and for a few hours, it's gone. But a dark patch? You can't shave that away. It sits there, like a stain on a white shirt.

I remember standing in my bathroom one morning, freshly shaved, skin as smooth as I could get it. And I still felt ugly. Because the colour around my chin was darker than my cheeks, my forehead, and my nose.

The hair was gone. The shame was not.

Does that sound familiar?

The Lies We Tell Ourselves

I used to have a whole set of excuses. Maybe you have them too.

"It's just the lighting." I blamed the bathroom bulb, the car mirror, and the office toilet light. Never my chin.

"Foundation will cover it." I used to layer foundation, then concealer, then powder. By afternoon, it would crease and show the patch anyway, and I'd be hiding in the toilet to fix it.

"It's just how my skin is." This was my favourite. It made me feel better for a minute, then worse.

"Everyone has this, no one notices." I said this to myself so many times I almost believed it. But I noticed. Every day.

Which of these have you told yourself? Be honest. I won't judge. I told them all.

What the Patch Has Cost You

Let's count, the way a market woman counts her change.

When you have dark marks, you spend money trying to hide or fix them. Here's an example of what a woman might spend in a year:

- Foundation and concealer to cover the patch, at ₦5,000 a month: ₦60,000 a year
- Three "fading creams" that didn't work, at ₦6,000 each: ₦18,000
- Soaps and scrubs that were meant to "brighten" skin, at ₦4,000 a month: ₦48,000 a year

That's about ₦126,000 in a single year. And that's before the products that burned or made things worse.

Now add the time. Five extra minutes every morning to cover the patch is over 30 hours a year. And add the confidence you've lost, every time you turn your face away from the camera.

I don't tell you this to make you feel bad. I tell you because I want you to see that you've already paid a lot. It's time to spend on what actually works.

The Photo I Hid From Everyone

Let me tell you about my own patch.

A year after the engagement party I told you about in the main guide, I was at a close friend's wedding. This time, I'd decided to be brave. I wore a lovely dress, I did my makeup carefully, and I felt good.

Then the photographer showed me the pictures on his camera.

In every one, there was a darker patch on my chin. Even under my makeup. In the flash, it looked like a smudge of charcoal.

I smiled, said "Lovely," and walked away. Then I went to the bathroom and cried into a paper towel.

That was the moment I stopped blaming the lighting. The patch was real. And if it was real, it had a cause. And if it had a cause, I could do something about it.

Why You Should Not Give Up

Here's the good news, and I want you to hold on to it.

Dark marks from razors, plucking, and picking are what skin doctors call post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation. Don't worry about the big name. It simply means your skin made extra colour after being irritated or injured.

That means the marks are not permanent damage in the same way a scar might be. In many cases, they can fade over time, when you stop the irritation, protect your skin from the sun, and give it the right care.

I say "many cases" because I can't promise every mark will disappear completely. Some marks fade fully, some fade partly, and some take a long time. But almost all of them can look better than they do today. Mine did.

Your First Step Today

Here's a small thing to do before the next chapter. It takes about five minutes.

1. Go to a window or step outside, where there's natural light.

2. Take one clear photo of your chin and jaw, without makeup. No filter.
3. Save it in a folder on your phone, and name it "Day 1." You will thank yourself later.
4. Write down in your notes: how dark is the patch on a scale of 1 to 10, and how long have you had it?
5. Write down every product you've used on it. Next to each, write whether it helped, did nothing, or made it worse.

Don't look at it for long. Just save it and move on. You're not judging yourself. You're setting a starting point.

The patch is not part of who you are. It's a mark your skin made, and marks can fade.But before we fade anything, we need to talk about something uncomfortable. Chances are, you're still doing some things every week that are creating brand new marks, without even knowing it. In the next chapter, I'll show you exactly why dark skin holds on to every mark, and why that "fast-fading" cream you bought may have made things worse. Once you understand this, you'll look at your bathroom shelf very differently.

Chapter 2
Why Dark Skin Holds On to Every Mark

Great job taking your Day 1 photo and listing your products—honesty is key here.
Let’s talk about why that dark patch has been so stubborn. Once you get how it works, you’ll stop beating yourself up.

Your Skin Has a Memory

Okay, so check this out. Your skin makes colour using special cells called melanocytes.
Everyone has them. Their job is to make melanin, the pigment that gives your skin its colour and protects it from the sun.
Now, in deeper skin tones, these cells are very active. That's a gift. It's why many of us look younger for longer and have natural protection from the sun.
But there's a catch. When your skin gets irritated or injured, those cells panic. They say, "Danger! Send more colour!" And they pour extra melanin into that spot.
So every time you pluck, pick, scrub, or burn your skin, you're sending a message: "Make more colour here."
Skin doctors call this post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation. I told you the name in the last chapter. In plain words, it means "a mark left behind after the skin was upset."
Think of it like a pot of soup left on the fire. When it boils over, it leaves a dark stain on the stove. You can wipe it. But if you keep letting it boil over, the stain gets deeper.
That's your chin. Not once. Hundreds of times.

The Things That Make New Marks

Here's what I learned. The marks aren't just from the hair itself. They come from what we do to it. These are the biggest culprits:
Plucking and threading. Each pull is a tiny injury. Your skin answers with extra colour.
Picking at bumps. I know it's tempting. But squeezing an ingrown hair is one of the fastest ways to make a dark spot. I've done it, and my chin paid for it.
Shaving too hard or too often. Pressing the razor, going over the same spot again and again, and using a blunt blade all irritate the skin.
Hair removal creams. They can burn the skin, and a burn leaves a mark.
Hot wax. If it's too hot or pulled badly, it can lift skin and leave a dark patch.
Rough scrubs and harsh soaps. Scrubbing with a sponge or a "brightening" soap thinks it's helping. It's not. It's rubbing a bruise.

Sun. We'll come to this in Chapter 4, but sunlight can make marks darker and keep them dark for longer.

Which of these have you done? Don't feel bad if it's most of them. I did all of them.

The Day I Tried to Bleach It Away

Now let me tell you about the biggest mistake I made.

After the wedding photos, I was desperate. I wanted the patch gone, and I wanted it gone fast. So I did what a lot of us do: I went looking for a strong cream.

A woman at the shop pulled out a small tube from under the counter. "This one is strong," she whispered. "It will clear everything in two weeks. Use it at night only."

I paid ₦7,000 without asking a single question. No label I could read. No NAFDAC number I checked. Just the promise.

For the first week, I was so happy. The patch looked lighter. I even told my friend, "I found it, I found the solution."

By week three, my chin looked thin and shiny. Tiny red veins showed on the surface. When I stopped the cream, the area flared up and looked darker than before. It took months to calm down.

I felt so foolish. But I've since learned I'm not alone.

What's Really in Those "Fast-Fading" Creams

Let me say this carefully. I'm not a chemist, and I don't want to scare you with things I can't prove. But I want you to know what to watch out for.

Some strong skin-lightening creams are sold without proper labels or approval. Depending on the product, they may contain:

- Strong steroids. These can make the skin look lighter for a while, but over time they can thin the skin, cause stretch marks, bring out acne, and make small veins visible.
- Mercury. This is a toxic metal that is banned in cosmetics in many countries, including Nigeria. It can harm your skin and your body.
- High-strength hydroquinone, used without supervision. In the right form and under a doctor's care, it can be used for short periods. But used wrongly, or for too long, it has been linked with skin damage, including a strange bluish-dark discolouration in some people. Many countries restrict it, and it has been regulated in Nigerian cosmetics.

Here's the problem. Many of these products don't list their ingredients, or the label is false. So you can't tell what you're putting on your face.

And there's another trap. When you stop using a harsh cream, the skin can bounce back darker, and you feel you need to use it again. That's how women get stuck for years.
My point is not to shame you. My point is: if a cream promises "overnight" or "two-week" results, that should make you suspicious, not excited.

Why the Marks Seem So Stubborn

Let me give you one more reason your marks may feel like they'll never leave.
Dark marks happen in layers. Some sit near the top of your skin, and these tend to fade faster. Some sit deeper, and these can take many months. Often, it's a mixture of both.
This is why a single cream, used for one week, can't do much. And it's why women who quit at week three never see the results that would have shown up at week ten.
The skin renews itself slowly. Your outer skin takes about a month to turn over, and the colour in a mark can take much longer to settle. That's not you failing. That's how skin works.

The Promise: What the SSF Method Can Do

Now here's the part I want you to hear clearly.
I'm going to teach you The SSF Method. It stands for Stop, Shield, Fade, and I'll walk you through each step in the next chapters.
What can it do? For many women, with patience and consistency over 8 to 12 weeks, it can:

- Stop new marks from forming
- Calm the redness, bumps, and irritation around your chin
- Lighten and even out many existing marks, step by step
- Give you a safe routine that doesn't depend on risky creams

What can't it do?

- It can't erase every mark in two weeks. Nothing safely can.
- It can't promise your skin will look "perfect." Smooth, even, and healthy is the goal, not a different face.
- It can't replace a doctor. If your marks are very dark, spreading, painful, or came after a harsh cream, I'll tell you in Chapter 5 when to see a dermatologist.

That's an honest promise. And honestly? It's better than all the loud ones you've heard before.

Your Step Today

Here's what I want you to do before the next chapter. It's about your bathroom shelf.

1. Gather every skin product you use on your chin and face. Cream, soap, scrub, serum, everything.
2. Check each label. Is there a full ingredient list? Is there a NAFDAC number (if you're in Nigeria) or a proper manufacturer's address? Is there an expiry date?
3. Put aside any product that has no ingredient list, no registration number, or that promises very fast "whitening" or "bleaching." Don't use it for now. Keep it in a bag. Don't throw it yet, just stop using it.
4. If any product has ever burned, itched, or made your skin worse, set it aside too.
5. Keep only a gentle cleanser and a plain moisturiser on your shelf for now.

If you're not sure about a product, take it to a pharmacist and ask. It costs nothing, and you may learn a lot.

So if you take nothing else from this chapter, remember this: dark skin marks easily because it's strong and protective, not because it's flawed. And the fastest-looking fixes are often the ones that hurt it most.

Now we begin the method itself. And the first step is the one that surprised me the most, because it's not a product at all. It's about the things you do without thinking, the little habits that keep creating new marks, even while you're trying to heal. In the next chapter, I'll show you how to stop them, how to treat razor bumps and ingrown hairs gently, and a 7-day challenge that will change how your chin looks. This is where it starts to get real.

Chapter 3
The First S: Stop (Or You're Filling a Bucket With a Hole)

Now that you've reviewed your bathroom shelf and understand why dark skin holds on to pigmentation, it's time to begin the SSF Method with our very first step: **Stop**.

It's completely natural to want to jump straight into fading your dark marks—everyone wants quick results! But skipping this fundamental step will only hold you back.

The Bucket With a Hole

Imagine you're trying to fill a bucket with water. You pour and pour. But the bucket has a hole at the bottom.

You keep pouring, and the bucket never fills. You get tired. You blame the water. You blame your hands. You never check the bucket.

That's what happens when you apply fading products while still making new marks. Every week, you fade a little. And every week, you plucked, picked, or scrubbed a little more. The two cancel each other out.

I fell into this trap for almost a year. I used one product after another and wondered why nothing worked. The answer was not in the jar. It was in my own fingers.

The good news is that this step costs nothing. You don't need to buy anything. You just need to change a few habits.

The Habits That Keep Making New Marks

Let me go through the common ones. Read them slowly, and be honest with yourself.

Plucking with tweezers. Even one or two hairs "just to tidy up" is an injury to the skin. If your chin is already marked, plucking is the quickest way to add more.

Picking and squeezing bumps. You see a bump, you feel it, and your hand goes to it. Ten minutes later, it's red, open, and bigger. A week later, it's a dark spot.

Digging for ingrown hairs with a pin or needle. I have done this, and I'm not proud of it. It creates a wound, and wounds on deep skin often turn into dark marks. It can also bring in infection.

Shaving over irritated skin. If your chin is sore, red, or bumpy, shaving over it is like scrubbing a wound.

Shaving too often, with too much pressure, or with an old razor. A blunt blade drags across the skin instead of gliding.

Rough scrubbing. Sponges, harsh soaps, and "exfoliating" gloves used on the chin rub the same spot over and over.

Touching your face all day. The hand-to-chin habit, the mirror check, and the little scratch while you're thinking. It all adds friction and irritation.
Hot water and strong soaps. They dry out the skin and make it more reactive.
Using harsh creams or acids. Anything that stings, burns, or leaves your skin tight and red can leave a new mark behind.
Which three are your biggest ones? Circle them in your mind. Those are the first habits we'll deal with.

Razor Bump and Ingrown Hair First Aid

Let me help you with the bumps first, because they're the main source of new marks.
An ingrown hair happens when a hair curls back into the skin instead of growing out. It looks like a small red or dark bump, and sometimes you can see the hair trapped underneath. Curly hair and close shaving make it more likely.
Here's the gentle way to deal with them:

1. Leave it alone. Don't squeeze, scratch, or dig. This is the hardest step, and the most important.
2. Warm compress. Soak a clean cloth in warm (not hot) water, and hold it on the bump for 5 to 10 minutes, once or twice a day. This softens the skin and can help the hair work its way out.
3. Keep it clean. Wash gently with a mild cleanser and lukewarm water.
4. Moisturise. Use a plain, fragrance-free moisturiser to keep the skin soft.
5. Don't shave that area until the bump has settled.
6. If a hair is clearly visible at the surface, you may use a clean, sterilised pair of tweezers to lift the loop gently, without digging. If you're not sure, leave it.

Now, please watch for signs that something more is going on. See a doctor or pharmacist if a bump is very painful, swollen, hot, filled with a lot of pus, or if you have a fever or the redness is spreading. That could be an infection that needs proper treatment. Don't try to fix that one at home.

How to Shave Without Making New Marks

If you shave, and many women do, here's the short version of the gentle method from my main guide. Marks come from bad shaving, not from shaving itself.

1. Wait until your skin is calm. Never shave irritated or broken skin.
2. Wash with lukewarm water first.
3. Use a clean, sharp razor. Change it often, and never share it.

4. Use shaving gel or a thick, plain lather. Never shave dry.
5. Shave in the direction the hair grows, with light strokes.
6. One pass, two at the most. Don't keep going over the same spot.
7. Rinse with cool water, pat dry, and moisturise.

Take your time. Rushing is the enemy.

The Urge to Pick

Let me talk about the part that nobody explains. Why is it so hard to leave bumps alone? Because picking feels like fixing. When you squeeze a bump, your brain says, "I'm doing something about it." It also gives a little hit of relief, like scratching an itch. For many of us, it becomes an automatic habit, done while watching TV, scrolling our phones, or sitting in traffic.

I used to pick without even knowing it. One day my friend said, "Kemi, you're doing it again." I looked down and realised my fingers were already on my chin. I didn't even remember lifting my hand.

If this is you, please don't be harsh with yourself. Habits like this are very common. Here's what helped me.

When the urge hits:

1. Notice it. Say to yourself, "I'm about to pick."
2. Pause for one minute. Set a timer on your phone. Most urges fade within a few minutes.
3. Give your hands a job. Hold your phone, fold clothes, squeeze a soft stress ball, or do something with your hands.
4. Put on a warm cloth instead of picking, if the bump is bothering you.
5. Remove the triggers. Don't sit with your face close to a magnifying mirror or in very bright light. Cover or turn the mirror around. If you're a night-time picker, put your phone away and wash your face before bed.
6. Cover the area with a small, clean patch or a thin layer of plain moisturiser when you can't stop touching it.

If you pick and slip, don't spiral. Just wash gently, apply moisturiser, and move on. One slip doesn't ruin your progress.

If your picking feels out of control, or it's causing you real distress, please talk to a doctor or a mental health professional. It's more common than you think, and there is help.

The 7-Day "No New Marks" Challenge

Now let me give you something to do. For the next seven days, we're not fading anything. We're just stopping the damage.

Day 1: Remove tweezers from your bathroom and bag. Put them in a drawer, or give them to someone. Take no pulls today.

Day 2: No picking or squeezing. Use a warm cloth on any bump that bothers you. Wash your face with lukewarm water and a gentle cleanser.

Day 3: No shaving today. Let your skin rest. Moisturise morning and night.

Day 4: No scrubs or harsh soaps. Use only your gentle cleanser. Notice how many times you touch your chin today, and write down a rough count.

Day 5: If your skin is calm, shave gently with the method above, or skip it if you don't need to. If it's still sore, wait another day.

Day 6: Spend ten minutes with your hands busy at the time of day you pick most. Maybe in the evening, in front of the TV or on your phone.

Day 7: Review your week. Write down how many days you went without picking, plucking, or scrubbing. Look at your chin in natural light. Is the redness calmer? Are there fewer fresh bumps? Write a few honest lines.

If you slip on a day, don't restart from zero. Just pick up the next day and keep going. Progress is more important than perfection.

What You May Notice

By the end of the week, many women notice that their skin looks calmer. There's less redness and fewer new bumps. That's a great sign, because it means the hole in the bucket is closing. Please don't expect the dark marks to fade yet. That takes longer, and we're not there. For now, a calm chin is the win.

I'll never forget the first morning my chin looked quiet. No redness. No fresh bumps. No tender spots. I stood in front of the mirror for a full minute, almost afraid to blink. It was such a small thing. But for me, it felt like a sign that I was finally on the right path.

So if you take nothing else from this chapter, remember this: you can't fade a mark while you're still making new ones. Stopping is the first and most powerful step.

But even with perfect habits, there's something else working against you, and it's happening every single day without you noticing. It's free, it's all around you, and it's been quietly making your marks darker. In the next chapter, I'll show you how to shield your skin from it, how to

choose a sunscreen that doesn't leave your face grey, and the simple habits that protect your skin while it heals. Many women skip this step, and it's why their marks never seem to budge.

Chapter 4
The Second S: Shield (The Boring Thing That Does Half the Work)

Having completed the 7-day challenge, you've successfully calmed your chin and closed the hole in the bucket. That is a real win, so give yourself credit for it.

Now comes the second S: **Shield.** It isn't exciting, and nobody posts a photo of their sunscreen with a caption like "this changed my life." But I'm telling you, this step decides whether your marks fade or stay stuck.

The Thing Quietly Darkening Your Marks

Remember how your skin makes extra colour when it's upset? Well, sunlight is one of the strongest signals for that.

When the sun's rays touch your skin, those colour-making cells wake up. And on a mark that's already healing, they wake up even harder. So every sunny day you walk around with an unprotected chin, you're telling your skin, "Keep this spot dark."

Think of a fresh cut on your hand. If you leave it in the sun every day, it heals darker and takes longer. Your marks are the same, only smaller and more stubborn.

That's why women use a good fading routine for months and still see little change. The fading products pull the colour down, and the sun pushes it back up.

"But Kemi, I'm Dark. I Don't Need Sunscreen."

I used to say this. My mother said it. My aunties said it. "Black don't crack, don't worry about the sun."

Here's the truth, and I say it with love. Deeper skin does have more natural protection, and it does burn less easily. That's real. But natural protection is not full protection. And it does not stop the sun from darkening marks, dark patches, and uneven tone.

So even if you've never burned a day in your life, once you have marks, sunscreen is part of your treatment. It's not about getting lighter. It's about keeping your marks from getting darker.

I'm not saying sunscreen is magic, or that you'll never see a mark again. I'm saying that without it, most other things you try will work much more slowly.

How to Choose a Sunscreen That Doesn't Leave You Grey

Now let's deal with the thing that stops most of us: the white cast.

You know what I mean. You put on sunscreen and your face turns grey or ashy, like you've rubbed flour on it. So you wipe it off and decide sunscreen is "not for us." I did this for years.

The good news is that things have changed. More brands now make sunscreens that work on deeper skin tones. Here's what to look for.

Look for these on the label:

1. SPF 30 or higher. SPF 50 is fine too. The number doesn't need to be extreme.
2. "Broad spectrum." This means it protects against both kinds of sun rays that affect skin. It's very important.
3. A texture you'll actually use. A thin gel, a light lotion, or a fluid is usually easier to wear than a thick cream. If you hate how it feels, you'll never use it. The best sunscreen is the one you'll put on every day.
4. Fragrance-free, if your skin is sensitive. Perfumed products can irritate a chin that's still healing.
5. For Nigeria: a NAFDAC registration number, a clear ingredient list, and an expiry date. Buy from a pharmacy or a trusted store, not from a roadside table. Fake and expired sunscreens exist.

Two types, in simple words:

- Chemical (or "organic") sunscreens usually sink in clearly and rarely leave a white cast. For some people, the sunscreens may sting or irritate, especially on sensitive or healing skin. If that's you, try another type.
- Mineral sunscreens use ingredients like zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. They're often gentler, but some leave a white or grey look. Look for ones that are tinted or labelled for deeper skin tones. Tints with iron oxides can also help protect against visible light, which some research suggests may darken marks on deeper skin.

Before you use any new sunscreen on your chin, do the patch test from my main guide. Put a little on your inner arm, wait 24 hours, and check for redness or itching.

What if your pocket is tight? You don't need an expensive one. A modest, registered sunscreen that you use every day beats a luxury one you keep in the cupboard. Some brands sell small sizes or sachets that cost less upfront. Start small, see how your skin feels, and buy a bigger size when you're sure.

What about sisters abroad? In the UK, look for SPF 30 or 50 with a high star rating for UVA protection. In the US and Canada, look for "broad spectrum." Many stores now have a section for sunscreens made for deeper skin tones, and a few of these are made by Black-owned brands. Some people believe sun protection isn't needed in cold or cloudy weather, but UV rays still reach you. On low-UV days, like many winter days in the UK, you may not need it, but it's

worth checking the UV index on your phone's weather app. When the UV index is 3 or higher, put it on.

How Much to Use (Most of Us Use Too Little)

Here's a mistake I made for a long time. I'd squeeze out a tiny drop, dab it on my cheeks, and think I was covered.

A tiny drop isn't enough. Here's the simple rule I follow:

1. For your face and neck, use about a quarter of a teaspoon, or the length of two fingers squeezed out in a line.
2. Dot it on your face, then spread it evenly, including your chin and jawline. Don't forget under your chin and the sides of your jaw.
3. Let it settle for a few minutes before you put on makeup or go out.
4. If you're outside for a long time, or sweating, reapply every two hours or so. If you wear makeup, you can use a sunscreen stick or powder for top-ups, or simply stay in the shade.

Put it on every morning, even on cloudy days, and even if you're mostly indoors. Sunlight comes through windows, and it comes through your car window too. Yes, the same car with the little mirror we talked about in the main guide. Your chin sits in that sunlight every time you're stuck in traffic.

Simple Habits That Protect Healing Skin

Sunscreen is the hero, but a few small habits help it along.

Use your umbrella. In Lagos, women carry umbrellas for the rain, but a plain umbrella works against the sun too. It's cheap, stylish, and one of the best shields you'll ever own.

Wear a cap or a hat. A wide brim keeps the sun off your jaw and chin. If you love scarves, drape a light one, and enjoy it.

Choose shade when you can. Walk on the shady side of the road. Park under a tree. Sit away from the window at the restaurant.

Be extra careful between 10am and 4pm. That's when the sun is strongest.

Protect your skin after you shave. Freshly shaved skin is a little sensitive, so try to keep the sun off it for the rest of the day. Use a gentle, fragrance-free sunscreen, and if it stings, rinse it off and let your skin settle before trying again.

Keep up your moisturiser. Healthy, hydrated skin heals better and handles the sun better.

None of these is hard. But together, they make a big difference.

A Small Story About Sunscreen

I'll be honest. I didn't take sunscreen seriously at first.

I'd put it on for a few days, forget for a week, then put it on again. And I wondered why my marks looked the same.

One of my friends, who is a nurse, told me, "Kemi, your skin is not stubborn. You're just not consistent." I wanted to argue. But she was right.

So I did a little experiment. I put my sunscreen next to my toothbrush, so I'd see it every morning. And I made a rule: no sunscreen, no leaving the house. Within a few weeks, it was automatic. And a few weeks after that, I started to notice my marks were fading a little instead of staying put.

It wasn't dramatic. But it was the first time anything had worked.

Your Step Today

Here's what I want you to do before the next chapter.

1. Choose a sunscreen: SPF 30 or higher, broad spectrum, with a texture you think you'll enjoy. If you're in Nigeria, check for NAFDAC registration and an expiry date.
2. Do a patch test on your inner arm, and wait a day.
3. If it's fine, start wearing it every morning on your face, chin, and neck, using about two fingers' worth.
4. Put it somewhere you can't miss, like next to your toothbrush or your keys.
5. Get a cap, an umbrella, or a light scarf and keep it in your bag or by the door.
6. Write down how many days this week you wore it. Your goal is every day.

Consistency is key—if you happen to skip a day, simply pick back up tomorrow.

The most essential takeaway from this chapter is that wearing sunscreen isn't about altering your natural complexion; it's about safeguarding your progress from being undone by sun exposure.

You've now done the two hardest parts. You've stopped making new marks, and you've started protecting your skin from the sun. That's the foundation, and it's where many women never get to. Now, finally, we can talk about fading. In the next chapter, I'll show you what actually helps, which ingredients to look for, how to choose a routine that fits your pocket, and how long to wait before you decide it's working. I'll also tell you exactly when it's time to see a dermatologist. This is the part you've been waiting for, and I promise it's worth the wait.

Chapter 5
The F: Fade (What Actually Works, Without the Hype)

So you've stopped making new marks, and you've started shielding your skin from the sun. That's the foundation, and honestly, many women never get this far. Be proud of yourself. Now we get to the part you've been waiting for. Let's talk about fading.

Before You Buy Anything

Let me give you three rules first. They'll save you money and a lot of regret.

1. Start only after you've done Stop and Shield for at least two weeks. If your skin is still sore, red, or peeling, fading products will only sting it. Calm skin first.
2. Add one product at a time. If you add three new things in one day and your skin reacts, you won't know which one did it. Give each new product two weeks before adding another.
3. Always do the patch test. Inner arm, 24 hours, every single time.

I broke all three rules in my early days. My chin paid for it.

The Ingredient Decoder

Walk into any pharmacy or scroll through any online shop, and you'll see a hundred names on the labels. Here are the ones most commonly used for dark marks, in plain words. I'm not a doctor, so please treat this as a list of things to ask a pharmacist or dermatologist about, not a shopping list.

- Niacinamide. A form of vitamin B3. It's usually gentle, and it can help even out skin tone and support the skin's barrier. Many people tolerate it well, which is why it's a popular starting point. A small number of people find high strengths irritating, so start low.
- Azelaic acid. Often used for dark marks and breakouts. It tends to be well tolerated on deeper skin tones, and some versions are available over the counter in lower strengths, while stronger ones need a prescription. It can tingle a little at the start.
- Vitamin C. Helps protect skin and can brighten over time. It can sting, especially in strong, low-quality, or old products. It also goes off quickly, so if it turns dark orange or brown, it's no longer good.
- Alpha arbutin. A gentler ingredient used to lighten marks. It's often found in serums. Look for properly labelled, registered products.
- Kojic acid. Sometimes used for marks. It can irritate some people and cause redness, so patch test carefully and don't use it on broken skin.

- Tranexamic acid. Increasingly found in skincare for stubborn marks. Evidence is still growing, and it's best to check with a dermatologist before using it, especially if you have any health conditions.
- Retinoids (like adapalene or retinol). These speed up skin renewal and can help marks fade, but they can also dry out and irritate the skin, and irritation can make marks worse. They shouldn't be used if you're pregnant or trying to conceive. Please don't start these on your own. A dermatologist or pharmacist can tell you whether they suit you and how to use them slowly.
- Hydroquinone. This is a strong lightening ingredient. It's very effective for some people, but it's also the one most often misused. It should only be used under medical supervision, for a limited time, at the right strength. Don't buy it from a market stall or from an unlabelled tube.

What I'd skip entirely: anything that promises to "bleach," "whiten," or "clear in days," and anything without a clear ingredient list. We'll cover the full danger list in the next chapter.
One more thing. If you're pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning a pregnancy, check with your doctor before using any of these. Some ingredients aren't recommended during those times.

Three Routines for Three Pockets

Now, here's how I'd put it together. Pick the one that fits your budget. The cheapest routine, done every day, will beat the most expensive one done once in a while.

The Tight-Budget Routine

This one uses very little, and it's where I started.
Morning:

1. Wash with a gentle cleanser and lukewarm water
2. Plain moisturiser
3. Sunscreen, every day, with no exceptions

Night:

1. Wash gently
2. Plain moisturiser

That's it. No fading product at all.
Does that surprise you? It surprised me. But Stop and Shield together can fade many light marks over a few months, because they remove the things that keep the colour in place. Give this routine eight weeks. If you still want to add something after that, add one single product from the decoder, such as a niacinamide serum, and do it slowly.

The Middle-Budget Routine

You add one active ingredient to your night routine.

Morning:

1. Gentle cleanser
2. A niacinamide serum (optional), then moisturiser
3. Sunscreen

Night:

1. Gentle cleanser
2. One fading ingredient, such as azelaic acid or niacinamide, starting 2 or 3 nights a week
3. Moisturiser

Here's how I'd add it: use it on one night, wait a day, and see how your skin feels. If it's calm, add a second night. After two weeks, try every night if your skin allows. If it burns, turns red, or peels, go back a step, or stop and ask a pharmacist.

The No-Limit Routine

If you have the budget, here's what's worth spending on. It's not about buying more products. It's about getting the right guidance.

1. See a dermatologist first. They can look at your marks, tell you what kind they are, and prescribe the right treatment at the right strength. This may include azelaic acid, a retinoid, or short-term hydroquinone, along with a plan for when to stop.
2. Follow their routine exactly, and bring your sunscreen and cleanser so they can check them.
3. Ask about professional treatments, such as certain gentle peels. But be careful here. Some peels, lasers, and microneedling can make dark marks worse on deeper skin tones if they're done wrongly. Ask whether the practitioner has experience treating skin like yours, and ask for a patch test first.

The most expensive thing is not always the best thing. A good dermatologist who understands deeper skin is worth far more than a luxury serum.

A Realistic Timeline

I want to be very honest here, because this is where most women quit.

Fading is slow. Very slow. Skin cells renew over about four weeks, and dark marks often take several cycles to lighten.

Here's what I'd expect, in general:

- Weeks 1 to 2: Your skin gets calmer. The redness and fresh bumps reduce. The marks look the same.
- Weeks 3 to 6: You may notice the edges of the marks starting to soften, or the marks looking slightly less dark in daylight. It's easy to miss, which is why your Day 1 photo matters.
- Weeks 8 to 12: For many women, this is where a clearer difference shows. The patch looks lighter and more even.
- Beyond 12 weeks: Deeper or older marks can take 6 months or longer. Some may never fully clear, but can look much better.

This is general, not a promise. Everyone's skin is different. Deeper marks, older marks, and marks that keep getting irritated take longer.

When I started, I almost quit in week four. I looked in the mirror and thought, "Nothing is changing." But when I compared my Day 1 photo to the mirror, I saw it. The edges had softened. The patch wasn't as dark. I'd been looking at it every day, which is why I couldn't see the change.

So here's my advice: don't check every day. Take a photo every two weeks, in the same light, in the same spot, and compare.

What to Do While You Wait

Waiting is the hard part. Here's what kept me going.

1. Keep doing Stop and Shield. They're not just the first steps. They're the ones that keep working.
2. Don't switch products every two weeks. Chasing new products resets your skin and your patience.
3. Be careful with makeup. If you cover the patch, use a gentle, fragrance-free foundation, and remove it fully at night. Don't scrub.
4. Don't compare your skin to filtered photos. Real skin has texture, and that's healthy.
5. Be kind to yourself on slow weeks. Skin heals in its own time.

When to See a Dermatologist

Some things need a professional, and I don't want you to wait on them.

Please see a dermatologist, or a doctor, if:

1. Your marks are getting darker, or spreading, despite your best efforts
2. You used a harsh or unregistered cream and your skin is thin, shiny, very red, or has visible small veins
3. You have a patch that is painful, rapidly changing in shape or colour, or looks different from your other marks
4. You have lots of bumps or ongoing breakouts, or bumps that leave scars
5. You've done Stop and Shield for 12 weeks and see no change at all
6. You have a skin condition, or you're pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning a pregnancy, and you'd like to treat your marks safely
7. You're not sure whether what you're putting on your face is safe

If you're in Nigeria and a dermatologist is far away or costly, ask a pharmacist for advice, or look for a hospital or clinic with a skin department. If you're abroad, your GP or family doctor can usually refer you, and in some countries, you can book a dermatology appointment directly. When you go, bring your Day 1 photo, a list of products you've used, and your sunscreen, so they can see the whole picture.

Your Step Today

Here's what to do before the next chapter.

1. Decide which routine suits you today: tight, middle, or no-limit. Be honest about your budget.
2. If you're ready to add a fading product, choose just one from the decoder, ask a pharmacist about it, and do your patch test.
3. Set a reminder on your phone to take a photo every two weeks, in the same natural light.
4. Write down the date you started, so you can count the weeks.
5. If any of the dermatologist signs apply to you, book an appointment this week.

You now have the whole method: Stop, Shield, and Fade. But before you start buying anything, there's one more thing I need to show you. It's a list of the products and ingredients I'd tell my own sister to stay far away from, along with how to check whether a product is real and registered. And I'll give you a week-by-week plan for the next 12 weeks, so you'll never wonder what to do next. That's what's waiting for you in the next chapter.

Chapter 6
The Danger List and Your 12-Week SSF Plan

You now have the whole method: Stop, Shield, and Fade. And you know how to match a routine to your pocket.

Before you start spending money, I want to protect your skin from the things that nearly ruined mine. This is the list I'd hand to my own sister.

The Danger List

I'm not trying to scare you. I want you to be able to look at a product and know when to put it back on the shelf. Here's what to watch out for.

1. Anything that promises to "bleach," "whiten," or "clear in days."

Healthy fading is slow. If the label or the seller promises results in a week or two, that's your first warning sign. Real skin care doesn't work that way.

2. Strong steroid creams used as skin lighteners.

Some steroid creams are legitimate medicines, but they're meant for treating conditions like eczema, under a doctor's advice, for short periods. When they're sold as "fast-fading" creams, they can thin the skin, cause stretch marks, bring out acne, make small veins visible, and leave your skin looking worse when you stop. Names you may see on tubes or in ingredient lists include clobetasol and betamethasone. If you're not sure, ask a pharmacist.

3. Mercury.

This is a toxic metal. It's banned in cosmetics in many countries, but it still turns up in unregistered products. On a label, you might see words like mercurous chloride, calomel, mercuric, or mercurio. If you see any of these, don't use the product. Mercury can harm your skin, your kidneys, and your nervous system, and it can pass on to others in your home, especially children, through touch.

4. Hydroquinone from an unknown source.

Under a doctor's care, at a proper strength and for a limited time, it has its place. But in market creams of unknown strength, used for months, it's a risk. Don't buy it from a stall, from an unlabelled jar, or from a seller who can't tell you the percentage.

5. Creams with no ingredient list, no manufacturer, or no registration.

If you can't see what's in it, who made it, and whether it's registered, don't put it on your face.

6. Homemade mixes that sound natural but aren't gentle.

Lemon juice, toothpaste, baking soda, and bleach-type household cleaners are things I have seen women use on their skin. Please don't. Lemon juice can irritate skin and, in the sun, can

even cause burns and darker marks. Toothpaste and baking soda disturb the skin's natural balance. Household bleach and cleaning products can cause chemical burns. "Natural" does not mean safe.

7. Skin-lightening injections and pills.

These are sold online and in some beauty shops, often as a quick route to lighter skin. They are not proven to be safe or effective for this purpose, and health authorities in several countries have warned about them. If you're curious, speak to a doctor first. Never buy these from a social media seller.

8. Harsh scrubs and strong acids used at home.

High-strength peels, strong exfoliating acids, and rough scrubs can injure the skin, and on deeper skin tones, injury often means new dark marks. If a product makes your skin burn, peel heavily, or look raw, stop.

9. Mixing many active products at once.

Using three or four strong ingredients together can overload your skin. Stick to one new product at a time, as we said in the last chapter.

10. Fake or expired sunscreen and skin products.

Counterfeits exist, and so do products that have sat in hot shops for years. Check the expiry date and buy from a trusted pharmacy or store.

If you've used something on this list and your skin is thin, shiny, very red, stinging, or showing small visible veins, please stop it and see a doctor or dermatologist. Don't stop a prescribed medicine suddenly without asking a professional, but do speak to someone soon.

How to Check If a Product Is Real and Registered

Here's a simple routine I follow before I buy anything.

1. Read the whole label. You should see the product name, a full ingredient list, the manufacturer's name and address, a batch number, and an expiry date. If any of these is missing, walk away.
2. In Nigeria, look for a NAFDAC registration number, and check it against NAFDAC's official channels, such as their website, before you buy. A number printed on a box doesn't prove the product is real, because fakes copy numbers too. If you're unsure, ask a pharmacist to help you check.
3. Buy from a registered pharmacy or a trusted store. Avoid unmarked tubes, roadside sellers, and "special" products sold from under the counter.

4. Be careful with online sellers. Check reviews from real customers, and look for a seller with a real address and a way to contact them. Remember that fake reviews exist.
5. If you're abroad, buy from a pharmacy, a well-known retailer, or the brand's official website. Check the ingredient list, and look up the product if you're unsure.
6. Trust your instincts. If the seller is rushing you, whispering, or promising a miracle, that's your answer.
7. Ask. A good pharmacist will not mind questions. If someone gets annoyed when you ask what's in the product, they've told you everything you need to know.

The Patch Test Without the Panic

Many women skip the patch test because it sounds like a lot of effort. It isn't. It takes about a minute, and it can save you weeks of regret. Here's the simple way.

1. Wash and dry a small area on your inner forearm, or just behind your ear.
2. Put a small amount of the product on that spot. About the size of a pea is enough.
3. Leave it alone for 24 hours. Don't wash it off unless the product instructions say to. If it starts to burn badly, rinse it right away.
4. Check it. If there's no redness, itching, swelling, or burning, you can try it on a small area of your chin the next day.
5. If you see a reaction, wash the area with lukewarm water, don't use the product on your face, and speak to a pharmacist if it's still bothering you.

A tiny tingle at the start can be normal for some active ingredients, but burning, swelling, or blistering is not. When in doubt, stop.

Your 12-Week SSF Plan

Now let's put it all together. This plan assumes you've done the 7-day challenge from Chapter 3 and started your sunscreen. If you haven't, begin there, and count Week 1 from the day you start.

Remember, you're not racing. If a week goes badly, just repeat it.

Weeks 1 to 2: Calm the Skin

- Do the Stop habits every day: no plucking, picking, or harsh scrubs
- Wash gently, moisturise, and wear sunscreen every morning
- Shave only when needed, using the gentle method
- Take your Day 1 photo if you haven't already
- Check your bathroom shelf and set aside any product from the Danger List

Weeks 3 to 4: Lock In the Basics

- Keep up your sunscreen, with a cap, umbrella, or shade when you can
- Keep going with no picking, using the warm cloth for bumps
- Pick your routine from Chapter 5 (tight, middle, or no-limit)
- If your skin feels calm, do the patch test on one product, if you've chosen to add one
- Take your first comparison photo at the end of Week 4, in the same natural light

Weeks 5 to 6: Add One Product, Slowly

- If you're using a middle or no-limit routine, begin your chosen product 2 or 3 nights a week
- If your skin handles it well, move up gradually, as in Chapter 5
- If you're on the tight-budget routine, carry on with Stop and Shield, and add nothing yet
- Watch for redness, stinging, or peeling. If any appears, step back a little

Weeks 7 to 8: Stay Consistent

- Keep the same products. Don't switch or add anything new
- Be extra strict with sunscreen. This is when many people get lazy
- Take your second comparison photo at the end of Week 8
- If you've booked a dermatologist, this is a good time to have the appointment

Weeks 9 to 10: Look for the Change

- Keep going. This is where many women start to see their marks softening
- If your skin has been calm for several weeks, you can talk to a pharmacist or dermatologist about whether to adjust your routine
- Notice how your skin feels, not only how it looks. Is it smoother? Calmer? Less reactive?

Weeks 11 to 12: Review and Decide

- Take your third comparison photo, and put your Day 1 photo beside it
- Ask yourself: Is the patch lighter? Is the edge softer? Are there fewer new marks? Is my skin healthier?
- If you see a clear improvement, keep going with the same routine
- If you see little or no change after 12 weeks of steady Stop and Shield, speak to a dermatologist. Some marks need professional care, and that's nothing to be ashamed of

After Week 12: Keep It Going

- Keep sunscreen as a daily habit for the long term
- Keep the gentle shaving and no-picking habits
- Continue your fading routine for as long as it's helping and your skin is comfortable
- Check in with a professional if anything changes

When Progress Feels Stuck

It will happen. There will be a week when you look in the mirror and feel nothing is moving. Here's what I'd do.

Check your habits honestly. Have you slipped on picking? On sunscreen? Have you been shaving over sore skin? Most "stuck" weeks come from small slips, not from the method.

Check the timeline. If it's been less than eight weeks, be patient. Many marks need longer than that.

Check your photos, not your mirror. Your eyes get used to what they see every day. Photos show what your mind misses.

Check your products. Is anything stinging or leaving your skin red? Is anything expired or from the Danger List? Remove it.

Check your stress and sleep. I know it sounds unrelated, but poor sleep and stress can slow skin recovery.

Ask for help. A pharmacist or dermatologist can look at your skin and see things you can't. It's not a failure to ask.

Don't start a new product out of frustration. This is the biggest trap. When progress feels slow, we grab the next shiny jar. Don't. Stay steady.

And if you've had a very bad week, a missed day or a picked bump, don't punish yourself. Wash your face, moisturise, put on your sunscreen, and begin again. You haven't lost your progress.

Your Step Today

1. Go through your products one more time, using the Danger List. Put any suspicious one away.
2. Check each product you plan to keep: ingredient list, manufacturer, expiry date, and registration number.
3. Pick your start date for Week 1 of the 12-week plan, and write it down.
4. Put a reminder on your phone for your comparison photos, at the end of Weeks 4, 8, and 12.
5. If any of the dermatologist signs from Chapter 5 apply to you, book your appointment.

Oftentimes, the safest route is the slow one. If a product or a promise sounds too fast, too strong, or too secret, it's not for your skin.

You've learned the method, the danger list, and the plan. All that's left is the most important part of all, and it's not a step or a product. It's about the morning you wake up and your chin looks like it belongs to your face again, and what that means for how you walk into the world. In the Conclusion, I want to tell you about that morning, and what I hope it looks like for you.

Conclusion
The Day Your Chin Matches Your Face

So you've made it to the end. You know the Danger List, you have your 12-week plan, and you understand the whole method.

Let me tell you about a morning that crept up on me.

The Morning I Stopped Reaching for the Concealer

It was an ordinary Tuesday. I was running late, as usual, and I grabbed my sunscreen, my moisturiser, and my keys. I was halfway to the door when I realised I hadn't picked up my concealer.

That tiny tube had been in my bag every single day for years. It was my little insurance policy, the thing I reached for before every meeting, every outing, and every photo.

I stood in the doorway for a second, almost went back for it, and then didn't.

I'm not going to tell you my skin was perfect that day. It wasn't. There was still a faint shadow on my chin, and there still is, on some days. But it was soft. It was nearly the same colour as the rest of my face. And for the first time in years, I didn't feel I had to hide it.

I walked out the door and the world carried on.

That's what I want for you. Not perfect skin. Just a day when you forget to cover up, because it's no longer the first thing on your mind.

Look at What You Know Now

Let's look back at how far you've come.

At the start, you had a patch you couldn't shave away. You blamed the lighting, the foundation, and your own skin. You'd spent money on creams that burned or did nothing, and you didn't know why the marks wouldn't leave.

Now you know why dark skin holds on to every mark. You know how to stop new marks from forming, from the plucking to the picking to the harsh scrubbing. You know that the sun is quietly darkening your marks, and how to shield your skin from it. You know the ingredients that are worth asking about, and the ones to run from. You know how to check a product before it touches your face. And you have a plan for the next 12 weeks that doesn't depend on a miracle.

That is the SSF Method: Stop, Shield, Fade. Three steps, in the right order, done patiently.

A Few Last Reminders

Before you go, let me leave you with the things I'd whisper to my own sister.

Patience is part of the treatment. Marks that took years to build won't disappear in a week. If you're consistent, your skin gets the chance to catch up.

Boring is good. Gentle cleanser, moisturiser, sunscreen, and no picking. It's not glamorous, but it's the foundation of everything.

Don't compare your chapter 3 to someone else's chapter 20. Some women's skin changes quickly, and some slowly. Neither means you're doing it wrong.

Get help when you need it. If something doesn't feel right, or your marks aren't changing, a dermatologist or pharmacist can see things you can't. Asking for help is a strength.

Be kind to the woman in the mirror. She's been through a lot. She tried, she learned, and she's still here, doing something good for herself.

A Note From Me to You

My dear sister, I wrote this for the version of me who stood in that bathroom, staring at a patch of darkness, believing it would be there forever.

If that's you right now, I want you to know that you're not stuck. Your skin is not your enemy, and it is not broken. It's been reacting to everything we've done to it, and now you know how to help it heal.

Start small. Start today. Wash your face, put on your sunscreen, and leave your chin alone. One day, you may find yourself walking out the door without the concealer, and it will feel like the lightest thing in the world.

And if you haven't yet read my main guide, Never Again: The Morning Mirror Check, I'd love for you to. Between the two guides, you'll have everything I wish I'd had when I started.

I'm rooting for you,

Kemi Rose