



Abubakar

In a month, he'll be a year old. He probably won't remember his stay on the Mercy Ship, but Abubakar's life will be different now.

Abubakar and his mother, Byuntu, visited the Mercy Ships Aberdeen Clinic and Fistula Centre in Freetown, Sierra Leone and were referred to the ship's doctors in Liberia. Soon they made the two-day journey in bush taxis from Freetown, arriving in Monrovia a day before the surgery that would correct his congenital cleft lip and palate.

Byuntu was clearly devoted to Abubakar, the youngest of her three children. It was obvious in the way she looked at him, in the way she patiently fed him—for a baby with cleft, eating is an arduous process, where about three-quarters of what is put into the child's mouth comes directly back out. Her husband, though, didn't feel the same about their child: he was convinced that his son was under some sort of curse, and he refused to have anything to do with the little boy.

On Tuesday morning, 24 January, Abubakar underwent a 90-minute operation that will—his mother hopes—change everything. By the afternoon, he was drowsily smiling and playing with Byuntu. He was eating well and without the difficulty he was used to; soon, the ward nurses discovered that tiny Abubakar even had an affinity for warm tea.

Within a few days, Abubakar and Byuntu will return to Freetown, to life as they knew it. And Abubakar will, before long, have his first birthday. Maybe his father will be there to celebrate.

