

SUMMARY:

40 WEEKS by Taran L. Bjørnstad – YA novel

Even is a talented and ambitious sport climber. He's about to qualify for the national team and is pushing himself every day. He's a senior in school and lives at home with his parents. He also has a sister studying in another town and a demented and outspoken grandmother. His tightly knit group of guy friends are planning for graduation, and the partying that comes with it and the Norwegian tradition called Russetid. He will apply for the military and plans to study and travel abroad. All in all he looks forward to putting adolescence behind him, move out and step into the world as an independent adult. To go traveling, climbing, studying, and spending time with his friends.

At a random "nachspiel" he meets Iben. She is impossibly beautiful, studies philosophy and is two years his senior. After a few magical hours they leave and spend the night together, with all that entails. Even is instantly hooked and deeply in love.

Even navigates into uncharted territory and tackles a rollercoaster of feelings, and thoughts about Iben that influences every little part of his life. He wants more. He wants to be with her. He can't stop thinking about her. When they meet again it is all consuming and fantastic, even though they are not intimate like that first night. He becomes increasingly fascinated by her while she talks about existentialism and philosophers. But after a while their meetings change character. Situations arise where Iben is hostile, yells and pulls away from him. She does not answer texts, is manipulative and distant the few times they do meet. Then she ignores him entirely. Even is devastated and heartbroken.

Even's childhood friend, Helene, lives next door. They know each other extremely well and have almost been inseparable, but for many reasons they do not hang out as much anymore. Helene has been left handicapped after a skiing accident, and does not have the same youth as Even, with parties, friends and "russetid". But Even knows she can fill in his "blank spots", so he shares more with her than what is to be expected in a friendship, and she has seen the emotional turmoil Iben has put him through. Helene is smart and opinionated and believes Even's obsession with Iben is unhealthy. But Even always defends Iben and is annoyed by Helene's take on his situation.

After weeks with the only life sign from Iben being incomprehensible handwritten letters, Even receives a call from an unknown number. It turns out to belong to a psychiatric doctor. Iben has been hospitalized in the psychiatric ward, and the doctor asks to meet Even in person. Even is stressed out by this but does go to meet with him.

The doctor explains that Iben is psychotic. She has released the doctor from duty of confidentiality so he can explain Even what is going on. Iben is ill, but the doctor believes she can get well with the right treatment. Even does not understand what this has to do with him, considering they are not in a real relationship. This is when the doctor reveals that Iben is pregnant, already in the third trimester, and she has named Even as the baby's father. Even is in shock. He denies it. They were only together that one night.

Even finds the situation absurd and unbearable. He confides in Helene.

The psychiatrist informs Even that Iben will not be able to take care of the child. She is too sick, and she does not want it. This revelation is confusing to Even and he cannot fathom what will happen next. The psychiatrist reminds him that there is one more parent involved, who is not sick. It will be up to him to decide what happens to the baby. Does he want to be a dad or leave it to child services?

Even is emotionally paralyzed. He feels like a life sentence has been brought down on him as he is faced with an impossible decision. He recognizes the dilemma from talks he and Iben had about existentialism and existential choices. Did she already know she was pregnant? He gets consumed in thought with Helene as his confidant. She is set on getting Even all the information available to help him make a choice. She believes Even is the father and that he must take care of the baby when it arrives. Even puts all his faith in a DNA test. He can not be a father.

When his mom and dad learn about the pregnancy that is already in the last stage, it turns out the two of them have had their own challenges. When Even was a baby his father left, only to come back a few months later. This has made its mark on their family, and it takes time for his parents to stand together and back Even. He will not be alone no matter what he chooses. While all this is happening Even's unknowing friends wants him to be more involved in their plans for graduation. He does not show up, scared they will find out his secret.

Climbing becomes a free space, but the thought of becoming a dad clouds his mind. His team leader, Hani, is constantly on him to concentrate, get out of his head and find focus.

When Even is out on a drive without his phone he comes back to a wall of missed calls. It is three weeks before Iben's due date but the baby has already been born. He thought he had three more weeks to figure this out, to meet with professionals and people who could help him. But now the baby is here, and he is not prepared.

The maternity ward is an unknown and scary place, and the first meeting with the baby is overwhelming. The Children's Services are there to try and solve the situation. Even looks at the little baby and can't understand how the little creature has anything to do with him. The woman from the Children's Services makes a note of his instant insecurity.

The next day his parents come with him to the hospital. The first meeting with their potential grand child is emotional. Children's Services decide to temporarily place the baby in a stand-by foster home, until the DNA-test comes back. Both of Even's parents reacts strongly to the fact that their most-likely-grand-child will have to live with a stranger, and they regret not being clearer with Even leading up to this moment.

Helene pushes Even to go and visit the baby in foster care. It's an emotional meeting, but Even is still certain he is not ready to take care of a child. A child that will force him to let go of all his dreams for the future. The foster mom is gentle and with her encouragement he gets to know the baby.

Waiting for the DNA results are nerve wrecking. Even is swaying between feeling of hope and despair. But when the results come in there is no doubt, Even is the father. He now has a big decision to make. Shall he choose himself or the child? Everyone keeps saying the decision is his own. But how can he choose?

He spills his secret to his climbing trainer, Hani, and his reaction is big and emotional. Hani is the first person to give him a clear answer as he can't fathom that Even is considering giving the baby up. Hani has fled from war and conflict and has a daughter himself. Hani is annoyed by Even's self-pity and -absorption: "You are not too young, you are too spoiled", he says and gives him an ultimatum. If he chooses the baby away, he will no longer be able to be part of the sport climbing club.

Even chooses the baby. It is tiresome and demanding, but he is also overwhelmed by love. Helene is a proud godmother, and he gets surprising support from his other friends. Even brings the baby to the climbing club where he meets a proud and supportive Hani. While the baby sleeps Even and Hani carry out what is called a "Buddy check", where the climbers check each other's harness, knot, and rope. This procedure is always important, but the most important "buddy check" Hani and Even made - was the one where Hani, by being absolute and clear, enabled Even to choose his own child.