Chapter-based Synopsis of Samantha Rising

Chapter One: Coming of Age

Set in Leon County, Texas, the narrative begins by describing the unhappy mindset of the book's central character, sharecropper Samantha Gibbs. The daughter of Irish immigrants dreams of a better life beyond the fields where her family struggles to survive. In 1946, the 16 year-old Valedictorian convinces her parents to allow her to travel to Houston, with a business associate/friend, partly because the man's pregnant wife could use Samantha's help around his house, and partly because Samantha's older brother Sean, a World War II veteran, agrees to help his father financially.

Chapter Two: Choice and Consequence

Marvin Jones takes Samantha to his home north of Houston, where she meets his pregnant wife Priscilla. Sam takes over chores around their house and learns to drive a '39 Buick, while the three await the birth of Priscilla's first child. The woman wishes to deliver her baby at home, after studying a famous book on the merits of natural childbirth, some of which she reads to Sam. Priscilla's pregnancy ends terribly, when her son is still-born. The event causes Samantha to commit herself fully to the concept of placing career aspirations above marrying and starting a family.

Chapter Three: Grace

The death of their child removes the Jones' need for Samantha's help, creating a quandary for the teen. She realizes she must quickly find work and a place to stay, or she'll be forced to return to the farm. Fortune smiles when prominent lawyer Paul Abbott learns about her, precisely when he needs a new secretary. An accomplished stenographer, Sam aces a test in her interview with the attorney, impressing him with her assertive personality, earning a job as his legal secretary.

Chapter Four: Commencement

Paul Abbott arranges for Samantha to live close to the offices of his law-firm, in the local YWCA, under the supervision of his friend, Nun Nancy Neal. The Sister pairs Samantha with Esther Murphy, a shy, troubled young woman whose parents died in a horrible accident, leaving her alone in the world. The roommates become fast friends, and Samantha begins proving herself admirably in the Abbott Law Offices. Paul Abbott's son John falls in love with Sam upon the moment they meet.

Chapter Five: Disparity

When Paul Abbott takes his African-American driver and his three sons fishing in Galveston, one of the boys breaks his arm. Though the lawyer has money and privilege, he's forced to take the youth to the Negro Hospital, since the others in town won't treat him. Disgusted by the overcrowded facilities, Abbott contemplates taking a public stand against segregation, but reconsiders after talking to a client. Paul and Sam discuss the “separate but equal” concept, recognizing its evil consequences.

Chapter Six: Buffs and Rainmakers

John Abbott involves Samantha in a sticky situation related to clients' lies and infidelities; she learns an important truth about legal processes. He also invites her to a Houston Buffs' baseball game, along with his current girlfriend and his father's former secretary, whose husband pitches for the team. While watching the game, John's girlfriend realizes he has feelings for Samantha. The young lawyer decides to create a situation where he can spend more time with Samantha, by convincing his father to send the two of them to Austin, to set up a new branch of the firm, close to the state capitol building.

Chapter Seven: Smooth Moves

John and Samantha move to Austin with the purpose of finding a suitable place to establish the new offices, living in a downtown hotel while they work. Samantha immediately takes the lead role in the process, displaying savvy negotiation skills and a comprehensive vision for the branding of the offices. The two succeed in setting up the branch before the end of 1946, accomplishing the task well under the budget extended to them by Paul Abbott, who's pleasantly stunned by what he sees.
Chapter Eight: Mirth

Thoroughly impressed by the young woman, Paul Abbott's wife Jennifer tells Sam about John's feelings for her. While agreeing to allow him to drive her home for Christmas, Sam waits for John to reveal his feelings. Eventually, she confronts him, and the two have their first kiss. Per Samantha's design, they agree to keep their relationship secret from their co-workers. During a New Year's Eve party at John's parents' mansion in River Oaks, their relationship grows more intense.

Chapter Nine: Milestones

Samantha enters classes at the University of Texas in the spring of '47, while serving as Office Manager of the Abbott Law Offices. During her college years, she proves herself as a competent student and manager. She negotiates her way into a five-bedroom house on the south shore of Lake Austin, where she and John meet discreetly. In '51, she graduates at the top of her class in the Department of Government, delivering a powerful commencement speech. John Abbott officially proposes marriage to Samantha immediately after the ceremony.

Chapter Ten: Arrangements and Adjustments

Samantha marries John in a simple wedding in Leon County, and the husband reveals he's purchased a ten-acre property, without consulting his new wife. The event angers Sam; she makes John promise to include her in all future financial decisions. Sam starts Law School, sponsored by a fellowship. During the first year, professors attempt to intimidate students by putting them on the spot. The second year, they try to overwork them, the third, to bore them stiff. Sam endures it all successfully, graduating at the top of her class again, then delivers another commencement speech.

Chapter Eleven: Extremes

Samantha's father Patrick perishes from lung cancer soon after she passes the bar exam. Sam's grief is exacerbated when she discovers she's pregnant. In her lowest moment, the lawyer questions her ability to manage motherhood and career. John helps her, by sending her back to work. She successfully negotiates a good settlement for a client, but realizes she needs to put her career on hold, while she starts a family. She studies parenting techniques, and with her mother's help, begins raising her children intelligently, while schooling her husband on his role in her plans.

Chapter Twelve: Legacy

When Samantha resumes her career in earnest, she quickly becomes accomplished. Paul and John help steer her into high-profile civil rights cases. In 1964, she earns national recognition by winning a lawsuit against a bigot who inappropriately tries to use the First Amendment to defend his hostile acts. In '72, she threatens to sue a company whose practices and policies violate the Equal Pay Act, convincing them to pay restitution and change their ways. Once a named partner in her firm, she writes policies which encourage the hiring of more females, and provide paid parental leave.

Chapter Thirteen: Goin' Up the Country

In 1979, after receiving a letter from Jimmy Carter, inviting her to the White House to interview for the position of Secretary of Education, Samantha takes her mother back to Leon County and then to Houston, for a send-off party and reunion. Multiple characters reveal ways in which the lady Longhorn lawyer has positively influenced them in their lives. The story ends with Samantha Abbott and her family staring up at the marble statue of an iconic president at the famous Lincoln monument.