



The Accidental President of Brazil: A Memoir

Fernando Henrique Cardoso

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Fernando Henrique Cardoso received a phone call in the middle of the night asking him to be the new Finance Minister of Brazil. As he put the phone down and stared into the darkness of his hotel room, he feared he'd been handed a political death sentence. The year was 1993, and he would be responsible for an economy that had had seven different currencies in the previous eight years to cope with inflation that had run at 3000 percent a year. Brazil had a habit of chewing up finance ministers with the ferocity of an Amazon piranha.

This was just one of the turns in a largely unscripted and sometimes unwanted political career. In exile during the harshest period of the junta that ruled Brazil for twenty years, Cardoso started his political life with a tentative run for the Federal Senate in 1978. Within fifteen years, and despite himself, this former sociologist was running the country.

And what a country! Brazil, it is often said, is on the edge of modernity, striding with one foot in mid-air towards the future, the other still rooted deep in a traditional past. It is a land of sophisticated music and brutal gold-digging, of the next global superpower and the last old-time coffee plantations. It is gloriously ungovernable, irrepressibly attractive, and home to the family, friends and extraordinary life of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. This is his story and his love song to his country.

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