



## CHAPTER I

# A Reluctant King

**I**N JULY 1998, KING HUSSEIN, THE RULER OF THE SMALL Middle Eastern country of Jordan, made a live TV address. He told his people that he was being treated for cancer. The news set off a wave of panic in Jordan's capital, Amman. For many Jordanians, their country without King Hussein was almost unthinkable. He had been on the throne for nearly fifty years and was the only leader most Jordanians had ever known.

Amman was also abuzz with the question of who would take King Hussein's place after he died. The answer seemed to be Hassan, Hussein's brother. Hassan was the crown prince, which placed him next in line for the kingship. But some elites were not sure about Hassan. They were angling to elevate Hamzah, Hussein's eighteen-year-old son, to crown prince so he could become the new king. Hamzah was the oldest son Hussein had had with his current wife, Queen Noor.

*Opposite: Roughly two thousand years ago at Petra, the site of an ancient city in southern Jordan, large structures were carved into stone. Al-Khaznah, "the Treasury," was the tomb of a king.*





### Rumors Spread

While the royal court gossiped and plotted, King Hussein was in the United States receiving treatment for his disease. But even that far away, he got wind of the rumors swirling around Amman.

The king wanted to know exactly what was going on. He asked his visiting son, Abdullah, his eldest child with his second wife, to fill him in. King Hussein especially wanted to know if it was true that Prince Hassan had started hiring and firing military officers, taking over the king's role

as commander in chief without his permission. Abdullah confirmed that this was true. But he also assured his father that the military, still loyal to the king, was ignoring Hassan's orders. Angry with Hassan, the king told Abdullah that he was thinking of changing the line of succession.

### A Final Trip Home

In the months that followed, the international press began to make wild speculations about Jordan. Their headlines told tales of palace intrigue. "Princes Jostle for Hussein's Crown," one declared.

Abdullah tried to ignore the hubbub, instead concentrating on helping his father. By early January 1999, that meant preparing for King Hussein's trip home so that he could see Jordan one last time.

Piloting his own plane, King Hussein arrived at the airport. He stepped out onto the runway, wearing a dark business suit and a kaffiyeh, a traditional Jordanian red-and-white headscarf. Although the king walked forward with resolve, he looked frailer than ever.

### Greeting Friends and Enemies

King Hussein made his way down a welcoming line full of Jordanian politicians and members of the royal court. Abdullah later recalled the king's behavior as "a quiet lesson in statecraft." With each greeting, Hussein sent a not-so-subtle signal about how he felt about each person, based on how they had acted in the six months he was away.



# Fast Facts

- Official name:** Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan  
**Capital:** Amman  
**Official language:** Arabic  
**Official religion:** Islam  
**Year of founding:** 1946  
**National anthem:** "As-salam al-malaki al-urdoni" ("Long Live the King of Jordan")  
**Government:** Parliamentary constitutional monarchy  
**Head of state:** King  
**Head of government:** Prime minister



Left to right: **National flag, King Hussein (left) and King Abdullah II**



Floating in the Dead Sea



- Area:** 34,495 square miles (89,342 sq km)  
**Latitude and longitude of geographic center:** 31°00' N, 36°00' E  
**Bordering countries:** Israel and the West Bank to the west, Syria to the north, Iraq to the northeast, and Saudi Arabia to the east and south  
**Highest elevation:** 6,083 feet (1,854 m), at Umm ad Dami  
**Lowest elevation:** 1,414 feet (431 m) below sea level, at the Dead Sea  
**Average high temperature:** In Amman, 55°F (13°C) in January, 90°F (32°C) in July  
**Average low temperature:** In Amman, 40°F (4°C) in January, 69°F (21°C) in July  
**Average annual precipitation:** 11 inches (28 cm) in Amman