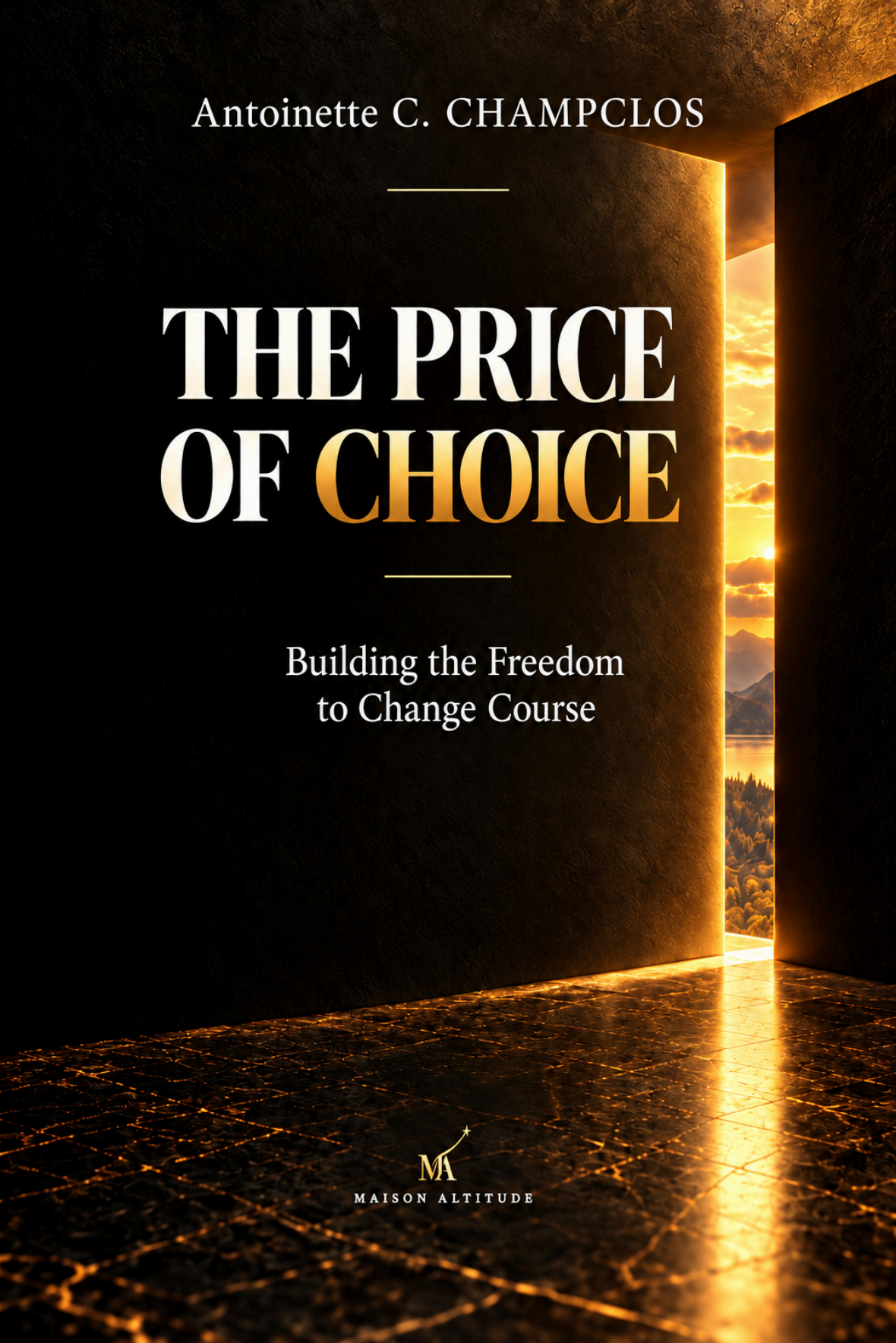

Antoinette C. CHAMPCLOS
THE PRICE OF CHOICE
Building the Freedom to Change Course
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MAISON ALTITUDE

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THE PRICE OF CHOICE

Building the Freedom to Change Course

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Certain names, biographical details and circumstances have been changed to protect the identities of those concerned. Some cases also combine elements from several real situations. These changes do not alter the strategic mechanisms presented in this book.

INTRODUCTION

What Does Your Freedom Cost?

There is probably something in your life you would like to change.

Perhaps you have been thinking about it for months. Perhaps for years.

A job you no longer want to do. A business you have become trapped in. A relationship you would not choose today. A city, a country or a home you would like to leave. A client you cannot risk losing.

You may even know exactly what you would rather be doing. And yet you stay where you are.

Why?

The answer is rarely as simple as a lack of courage. Very often, the real problem lies elsewhere:

you cannot yet afford the consequences of your decision.

Leaving your job means losing your salary.

Leaving your partner may mean losing your home, part of your standard of living, or your legal or financial stability.

Turning down your largest client may put your business at risk.

Selling your company may set you free — or remove the structure that finances your entire life.

Changing course has a price. I call it the Price of Choice.

And that idea lies at the heart of this book.

We Measure Freedom Poorly

We have learnt to measure success by what we own.

How much do you earn?

What is your home worth?

What is your net worth?

In certain circles, these measures become almost a social language.

I live near Monaco. I know that world well. Its signs of success can be spectacular: properties, businesses, cars, wealth, connections, access.

But over the years, I have become interested in another question. A much less visible one:

What can you actually change?

You earn €3,000 a month, and your salary pays for your home, your bills and your daily life. Can you leave your job if you can no longer bear it?

You earn €30,000 a month, but your lifestyle, your commitments and your family depend entirely on that income. Can you leave your job?

Your business relies on one client for half its revenue. Can you genuinely afford to lose that client?

You are in a relationship you freely chose ten years ago. Would you have the means to leave it today if you decided to?

This is where my definition of freedom begins.

The true measure of freedom is not only what you can afford to have.

It is what you can afford to change.

That distinction changes everything.

The Price of Choice

Every important decision has a price. Sometimes it is financial. But not always.

To change your life, you may need capital. Time. A transferable skill. An independent income. A home. A legal right. Information. A network. An alternative.

The problem, then, is not always that you do not know what you want.

You may know perfectly well.

The problem is that the price of your choice currently exceeds the power you can mobilise to act on it.

I call that your Available Power.

Power here does not mean power over other people. It means the real capacity to act when circumstances change.

When:

Price of Choice > Available Power

your decision exists in your mind, but in practice it is not yet fully yours to make.

Between the two lies a gap. Your Freedom Gap.

The aim is not necessarily to make the decision immediately. It is to build enough power — and sometimes to reduce the Price of Choice enough — for that choice to become genuinely available.

You do not need to leave your job. You need to be able to leave it.

You do not need to sell your business. You need to be able to sell it if that becomes the best decision.

You do not need to leave your country, your home or your relationship. But staying means something different when leaving is also possible.

A choice you cannot refuse is not quite a choice.

What Aviation Taught Me About Freedom

Aviation was part of my life for more than fourteen years.

I flew, trained and eventually earned my commercial pilot licence.

Aviation taught me something I understood only much later in the context of a human life: a good pilot never builds safety around a single assumption.

You prepare your route. You know your position. You calculate your reserves.

And, above all, you plan an alternate airfield — an Alternate.

The Alternate is not there because you necessarily expect to use it. It is there to preserve your ability to change course if circumstances change.

A pilot does not need to change course.

A pilot needs to retain the option.

Safety comes from keeping enough options available to respond when the original plan no longer works.

We find this obvious in a cockpit. Strangely, we often organise our lives in precisely the opposite way.

One income. One essential client. One marketable skill. One person on whom our standard of living depends. No reserves. No Alternate.

Then we call it stability.

Many apparently stable lives are, in fact, extremely fragile. They work perfectly as long as nothing changes.

This book grew out of that contradiction.

I Did Not Learn This Only in a Cockpit

My own life has changed course several times.

I was born in Minsk.

At sixteen, I left the world I had grown up in and went to Germany. Later, I left Germany to study in France.

I have lived in several countries, within several systems, through several lives.

I have flown aircraft.

And then, one day, I was a passenger in an aircraft that crashed.

I was not at the controls. It was not my flight, my decision or my course to steer.

But the consequences became mine.

Within seconds, an event I had neither chosen nor controlled profoundly changed the course of my life — my body, my priorities, my understanding of risk, safety and what it really means to retain the ability to choose what comes next.

And perhaps this is one of the most important lessons in this book:

we do not control every event that can change our lives. But we can build the power that determines how far its consequences can control what happens next.

After the crash, I had to rebuild.

Once you have seen a life change course in seconds, your relationship with safety changes.

You understand that continuity is never guaranteed.

But the real lesson was not that life is dangerous. It was something much more useful:

a robust life is not one in which nothing can change.

It is one that can absorb change without losing its capacity to act.

In the years that followed, I began to look at my life as I had once looked at a flight.

What is my actual position? What is my destination? What do I depend on?

What could interrupt my course? When does a choice become too costly? When has it been prepared well enough to become possible?

Gradually, these questions ceased to be mine alone.

They became a method.

Freedom Is Not a Feeling. It Is an Architecture.

I am not going to ask you to feel freer, or tell you to "believe in yourself" so strongly that your constraints disappear.

Nor will I pretend that every decision is immediately possible.

Some are not. Some are extremely costly.

Some take months. Others take years.

The question is therefore much more concrete:

What would need to be built to make this choice possible?

This is what I call Freedom Architecture.

An architecture for your life in which important decisions depend less and less on permission, goodwill or the continued availability of any single external element.

Money is part of it. Often an essential part. But it is not the whole architecture.

One person may be wealthy and deeply dependent. Another may have less capital but more options.

You can begin to expand your freedom to choose long before you have substantial capital: the factor that limits a decision is not always financial.

What interests me is the real power behind a decision.

What We Will Do Together

This book is not simply meant to be read. It is meant to be used.

Over the coming chapters, we will turn a sometimes vague question —

Why do I feel stuck?

— into a much more precise map.

We will establish your Current Position, identify the change you want to make possible, calculate its Price of Choice, examine your Available Power and measure the distance between them — your Freedom Gap.

We will then identify your concentrations of risk, build your reserves, prepare your Alternates and recognise the options that are beginning to close.

Then, step by step, we will build your Flight Plan.

By the end of this book, my aim is not for you to have changed your entire life.

It is much more specific.

I want you to know exactly:

what prevents you from making an important change today, what you lack to make it possible, and what you need to build now so that the choice becomes yours tomorrow.

Take a notebook. Or write directly in this book.

Do the exercises. Write down the figures, even when they are uncomfortable.

Do not try to make your situation look more elegant than it is.

A pilot who falsifies the fuel figures does not gain more fuel. The flight simply becomes more dangerous.

So we will work with reality.

Not with what your life ought to be, or what other people think it is.

With what it is.

Your actual position comes first.

Because no serious Flight Plan begins anywhere else.

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