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US Dept of Interior (NPS) Hovenweep National Monument Square Tower Group: Hovenweep Poem

National Park Service of the United States

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THE PALACE

1902

When I was a King and a Mason--a Master proven and skilled--
I cleared me ground for a Palace such as a King should build.
I decreed and dug down to my levels. Presently, under the silt,
I came on the wreck of a Palace such as a King had built.

There was no worth in the fashion--there was no wit in the plan--
Hither and thither, aimless, the ruined footings ran--
Masonry, brute, mishandled, but carven on every stone:
"After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known."

Swift to my use in my trenches, where my well-planned ground-works grew,
I tumbled his quoins and his ashlar, and cut and reset them anew.
Lime I milled of his marbles; burned it, slacked it, and spread;
Taking and leaving at pleasure the gifts of the humble dead.

Yet I despised not nor gloried; yet, as we wrenched them apart,
I read in the razed foundations the heart of that builder's heart.
As he had risen and pleaded, so did I understand
The form of the dream he had followed in the face of the thing he had planned.

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When I was a King and a Mason--in the open noon of my pride,
They sent me a Word from the Darkness. They whispered and called me aside.
They said--"The end is forbidden." They said--"Thy use is fulfilled.
"Thy Palace shall stand as that other's--the spoil of a King who shall build."

I called my men from my trenches, my quarries, my wharves, and my sheers.
All I had wrought I abandoned to the faith of the faithless years.
Only I cut on the timber--only I carved on the stone:
"After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known."