

## The Wire

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SEASON 3

### 32: Back Burners

## Synopsis



Directed by: Tim Van Patten  
 Story by: David Simon & Joy  
 Lusco Kecken  
 Teleplay by: Joy Lusco Kecken

"Conscience do cost." - Butchie

Avon Barksdale, out of prison and on the prowl, rides the West Side with Slim Charles, who shows him how the cops are out in force on the drug corners. "Likely 'cause we been dropping bodies," explains Charles. He also tells Avon that Marlo — following Barksdale's attempted hit on it — has closed up shop and is working as a drug wholesaler instead a retailer. Barksdale is amazed at Marlo's hasty retreat: "An' I was just beginning to respect the motherfucker for showin' heart." Here, on duty in the free zone, is amazed when he spots Avon Barksdale, riding by in an SUV.

Cutty, forswearing the gangster life, has gone back to work with the yard crew and his eagerness to do a good job impresses his supervisor. "You walked through them old doors, didn't you," he asks Cutty. "Tried to," Cutty admits, and then confides in him that things haven't been going so well.

At the Detail Office, Lt. Daniels summons his crew, and informs them they're no longer pursuing Kintel Williamson. McNulty and Greggs share a guilty look when Daniels announces that their new targets are Stringer Bell and Marlo Stanfield. Their backdoor plot through Bunny Colvin has worked, but Daniels then calls McNulty into his office and asks him point blank if he went to Colvin behind Daniels' back. When McNulty admits he did, Daniels is furious: "When the cuffs go on Stringer," he says, "you need to find a new home. You're done in this unit."

Omar, through his advisor Butchie, arranges to purchase Dozerman's missing service revolver — the same gun Bunk has been pursuing. The gun appears after Omar puts the word out on the street, but Omar is reluctant to pay the gangster who supplied it until Omar is sure it's

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authentic. "Tell him I'll pay when it proves itself," Omar says to Butchie. "Told him that already," responds Butchie. "He say you can make it \$1,500 for his trouble." Then Butchie adds: "Conscience do cost." Through Butchie, the gun is returned to Bunk.

Barksdale soldier Bernard delivers to Shamrock a fresh load of burners — cell phones the Barksdale gang uses and discards after their minutes are used up — so the gang is always a step ahead of the wire. Shamrock tells him they'll need 60 more in a few days. As Bernard heads out to purchase them the next day, a few at a time at a variety of convenience stores so as not to arouse suspicion, his smart-mouthed girlfriend Squeak chides him for not making quick work of the job by purchasing all the phones from a few stores. She wants to go to the movies.

Colvin and Mello go over the latest crime statistics for Colvin's district and learn that shootings and aggravated assaults are down five percent in almost every neighborhood except the free zone. Mello wants to know if Colvin's going to let his bosses know that his experiment is working. "Too soon to take any credit," says Colvin. "Might just be a, what do you call it, statistical aberration."

Councilman Carcetti tracks down Police Commissioner Burrell outside City Hall and then learns that Mayor Royce never even called Burrell, as he'd promised, to deal with the matter of beefing up the city's witness protection program. An angry Carcetti is determined to exploit the recently murdered drug witness who was in police custody by using it against Royce. "You're not gonna fuck me on this?" Burrell demands to know. "As it is, I've got the Mayor's teeth in my ass on this," he says. Carcetti promises that he won't but later meets with Theresa D'Agostino at his house to plot strategy. She advises him not to confront the Mayor now by going to the press. "No one's gonna remember your dead witness a year from now," she tells him. "Wait for another witness to be killed, closer to the election," she says.

Freamon explains to McNulty and Greggs what he's gleaned from the cell phone of Marlo's soldier Fruit, which Bubbles retrieved and gave to Greggs. The data, which shows calls made to a network of now-defunct cell phone numbers, isn't worth much by itself. "It's all historical," says Freamon. "We can find the network no problem, but when we do it's a week old and they've dumped their phones. How we get a wire up — that part I haven't figured out yet." He adds. "Get us one good phone and we can do the whole network."

Donette, over dinner at her apartment, enrages Stringer Bell when she tells him that she shared with Brianna — D'Angelo's mother — that the police are no longer convinced that D'Angelo's death while in prison was a suicide. "It's her son," Donette says defensively. "Ain't she got a right to know?"

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Bubbles, selling tunic-length white T-shirts out of a grocery cart, visits Hamsterdam at night. What he sees is a nightmare orgy of drug users shooting up, smoking crack; prostitutes at work; fighting and general chaos, complete with lots of young boys standing around idly, no longer needed by the drug lords as runners and lookouts. Amidst the inferno, Bubbles spots Johnny in a crack house, badly strung out and looking seriously ill.

There's trouble at Greggs' house when she returns home after a late night at a bar. Cheryl is furious and lays in to Greggs. Greggs says she's disappointed at the way their life has changed. "I miss us," Greggs says. You wanted the baby, she tells Cheryl, "and I didn't want to disappoint you on it. I didn't wanna lose you." Cheryl's response: "I don't think I could be more disappointed than I am right now." Angry and hurt, she asks Greggs to leave.

In Hamsterdam, Carver angrily confronts a dealer who's cut loose the kids who worked for him as runners and lookouts on the city's street corners. "So here you are making money hand over first and you're too damn greedy to take care of your work force." Carver tells the dealer that in the future, he and the other dealers must each cough up a hundred dollars a week as a kind of tax, simply for the right to do business in Hamsterdam.

When the dealer comes back later and gives Carver the money he's requested, Carver hands it back to him and tells him to pay the young boys with it, whether they do work or not. "Shit is like unemployment insurance," Carver explains. "Every employer got to pay in. And if I find anyone holding out, he's out of here, and back on the street getting' his head busted." Herc, observing the scene, asks Carver: "What are you, a fucking communist?"

Having learned that Mayor Royce lied to him about shoring up the city's witness protection system, Carcetti goes back to the Mayor's office to pressure him into action. "Mr. Mayor, we're probably only talking a few hundred thousand dollars that's not already spoken for," Carcetti prods. The Mayor, irate, responds: "Where would you have me begin, Councilman? Should I divert the money budgeted for snow removal in the first district this winter? How 'bout I reduce trash pickup citywide to once and week and put up witnesses at the Hyatt Inner Harbor?" The Mayor's point: With the city in sorry financial shape, he can't do any better. Carcetti takes this in without a response, but considering his own course of action.

Staking out a drug corner, Greggs, Sydnor and McNulty observe Bodie and his crew suddenly jump in their SUV and drive away. Suspecting they have drugs with them, the detectives radio ahead and have the car stopped. Bodie and his company are outraged, especially since they are holding a sizeable quantity of drugs. They maintain they were heading for

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Hamsterdam to sell the drugs that have been seized, and are thus untouchable. "Yo, Officer, we got immunity from y'all. We goin' to the free zone." McNulty and his fellow detectives have no idea what the dealers are talking about and the scene grows increasingly tense until Major Colvin shows up.

When Colvin arrives shortly thereafter, he pleads with McNulty and his fellow cops to let the matter slide, and not to take news of the free zone downtown. "I know it hurts your heads to think about it, but before you decide to lose your minds over this, you might take a moment and ride past some of my drug corners," Colvin says. "Empty. All of them. And district-wide, my crime is down five percent." Greggs is incredulous: "You legalized drugs and you didn't tell the bosses." Colvin explains that he's "just trying to save what's left of my district if I can. And the longer I have before I have to brief the bosses about this..."

McNulty explains that they got what they wanted from the car bust anyway, which was a live cell phone with minutes left on it, and which Freamon can now use to trace the Barksdale network. Besides, McNulty owes Colvin a big favor for leaning on Rawls to redirect the Daniels detail once more towards McNulty's favorite target: Stringer Bell. McNulty assures Colvin that his secret is safe, and then delivers Bodie's cell phone to Freamon, who is pleased in the extreme.

Bell meets with his attorney, Maurice Levy, angry that Levy didn't stop Brianna from going to the police to see if she can learn whether her boy D'Angelo was in fact murdered. "It was her son," says Levy. "How was I going to stop her? There's no harm done if she keeps her mouth shut and just listens." Levy also suggests that Avon should know what's going on. Bell, brooding darkly, says he'll handle that matter.

McNulty tracks Theresa D'Agostino to a DNC fundraiser in Washington, and talks his way into the event, intent on seeing her again. Finding her deep in conversation, he starts to leave when she catches up to him, presses her room key into his hand and tells him to wait for her, that she'll be free by 11 p.m.

Cutty visits Grace's friend the deacon at church, and explains that he's now serious about changing his life. "I had this feelin' for a long time now like I'm outside of myself, watching me do things I don't wanna do, you know?"

At a ceremony at police headquarters, Burrell and Mayor Royce grandstand for the press over the return of Dozerman's service revolver. "Officer Dozerman," the Mayor says, "our citizens want you to have this back and to thank you for your service in defense of our city." Carcetti, watching the press conference on TV, is deflated by the good publicity for the Mayor.

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The throwaway cell phone confiscated from Bodie is a potential breakthrough in the Detail's case against Bell and Barksdale. "Check it out," says Freamon, who has quickly managed to track all the calls placed to and from the phone. This is the pattern of a closed communication network. Something that you would expect from a drug organization. This particular one so far involves fifteen distinct burners." The bad news is, even if they get a wiretap approved, it'll take so long that the other throwaway phones the dealers are using will have been discarded by the time the approval comes through. But Freamon says it would be helpful to corroborate his theory if the Detail could collect more throwaways from Barksdale corners.

Marlo, still smarting from Barksdale's attack on him and his gang, responds by ordering one of his female soldiers, Snoop, to take revenge. In short order, she shoots at Barksdale's gang members Poot and Rico. Rico is killed but Poot escapes, shaken but unharmed.

Herc stuns McNulty by telling him that Avon Barksdale is on the loose again, that Herc saw him riding in an SUV. Greggs doesn't believe it either: "Jesus, Herc. He's at Jessup, down for four or five at least. What, we all look alike to you?" At the Detail Office later, McNulty is incredulous when he checks Barksdale's status at the prison and learns that in fact, Avon has been released. Daniels, Freamon, Prez, Sydnor, and Greggs gather around McNulty's computer, disbelieving and disheartened. Avon Barksdale has beaten the system.

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