Boy Walking Bike By Cops

Two cops are standing on a well-lit sidewalk at night, talking to a black man. To their left is a corner store, and further left, the cross street. To their right, a black boy walks his bike on the sidewalk, away from them. One of the cops appears to be arguing with the man. But the other cop, while standing beside his partner, has his head turned away, down the street, his eyes on the boy with the bike.

The sign above the corner store says "Lotto," and underneath, "Cold Beer." Coupons and posters that look like blown-up coupons cover the windows completely. In the doorway, a woman waits for a man to exit before entering. This man has a black t-shirt and gray beard, and he is looking at the woman in a way that suggests he is deciding on whether or not to let her pass first. The woman has her back to us, and nothing about her clothes tells us anything about what her face might look like, nor her age, state of mind, nothing.

There is a mural on the wall to the right of the store, behind the cops and pleading man. The mural depicts a big blue whale underwater, surrounded by turtles, starfish, clownfish, jellyfish, rocks, and coral, and a naked woman floating horizontally in front of the whale, gently pressing her forearm against its nose, as an angel would bless a child. Needless to say it marks a stark contrast between it and the scene playing out in three dimensions on the sidewalk, the two cops teaming up against the man.

The viewer follows the second cop's gaze to the boy walking his bike. What is it about this boy that has caught the officer's attention? The easy answer is that he's watching to see if the boy will stop walking his bike and start riding it on the sidewalk, which would be illegal, and allow him then to run after and ticket the boy. This makes us think of the crime itself, of

biking on the sidewalk as a ticketable offense. This is a city they're living in, and the boy's no more than ten years old. Would it really be safer for everyone if he rode in the street? In any case, he's walking his bike on the sidewalk now. He's not riding in the street, but walking it on the sidewalk, there's a reason for this, and this is perhaps what has caught the officer's attention. The officer is not asking: "Will I have to run after this kid when he starts biking illegally?" Instead, he's asking: "What's this kid doing on the sidewalk, walking his bike?"

We look more closely at the kid. He is wearing a backpack, and the backpack is open. He's got blue stains on his white tank top. We glance back towards the officer, but we noticed something along the way. Between them, the boy and the officer, lying on the ground, is a black canister with a blue cap.

"The boy must have left it here earlier, after working on the mural, and had only just come back for it," the cop could conceivably hypothesize. "Only, there were cops."