Benny and the Beautiful Blue Shell

By James Shang

Before you begin

We recommend reading Raffy and Arlo's Amazing Workshop before this story. Discover how Raffy's jump was made and where the beautiful blue shell came from.



Clancy heard the rustling before he saw the bird.

Deep in a leafy forest, well inland from the beach, something dark and glossy hurried through the leaves. A pale beak held a blue feather.

Clancy landed on a low branch.

"Hello down there."

The bird stopped.

"Oh! Hello. Just a moment."

He placed the feather beside a little patch of blue flowers, stepped back and tipped his head.

Then he moved it.

Only a little.

Clancy leaned forward.

"Was it in the wrong place?"

"Nearly in the right place," said the bird.

Sunlight slipped across his blue-black feathers. His violet eyes shone as he looked up.

"I'm Benny."

"Clancy."

"Come and have a look!"



Two walls of slender twigs rose from the leafy ground. Their tops curved inwards until they touched, making a narrow passage beneath them.

Outside lay Benny's treasures.

Blue flowers. Blue feathers. A little blue pebble.

A silver coin caught the light beside a crinkled piece of foil.

Clancy hopped closer.

"Did you build all this?"

"Yes! It's my bower."

"Do you sleep in it?"

"No," said Benny. "It's my special place to decorate. I want it looking its best."

He hurried over to the foil and turned it towards a shaft of sunshine.

Flash!

Clancy blinked.

"That's bright."

"Lovely, isn't it?"

Benny stepped back to admire it. Then his eye caught the blue feather.

He moved it again.

Clancy watched.

"Nearly?"

"Very nearly."



Later, Clancy found Raffy at his muddy slide.

Down came the little mudskipper, belly skimming the slippery bank.

Sliiiide.

Hop!

Raffy sailed over the wooden bar and landed in the soft mud beyond.

Clancy shuffled along his branch.

“Arlo made you a very good jump.”

“He’s got a whole workshop!” said Raffy. “Things that turn. Things that spin. Tools everywhere.”

“And eight arms to use them,” said Clancy.

Raffy’s eyes widened at the memory.

“They hardly stopped.”

He wriggled closer to the water.

“There was a shell there too. Deep blue. You should have seen it.”

Clancy went quiet.

He looked inland, towards the forest.

“A blue shell?”

“Beautiful,” said Raffy.

“I’ve just met someone who would love that.”



Raffy listened while Clancy told him about Benny’s bower.

“The flowers have their own place,” Clancy explained. “So do the feathers. And there’s a bit of foil you can nearly see yourself in.”

“Where would he put a shell?”

“I expect he’d have to think about that.”

Clancy tipped his head.

“I wonder whether Arlo would trade it.”

“I’ll ask him,” said Raffy.

He slipped into the water, leaving little ripples spreading between the mangrove roots.

At the workshop, Arlo was turning an empty shell in its cradle.

One arm brushed.

Another steadied.

His measuring stick rolled off its support.

A third arm caught it.

“Still doing that?” asked Raffy.

“Still doing that,” Arlo replied.



Raffy told Arlo about Benny and his blue treasures.

“Would you swap your shell for something?”

Arlo settled the measuring stick on the sand.

“Perhaps. I need a particular piece of timber for a new stand.”

“What sort?”

“Short and sturdy, with a fork at one end.”

He drew the shape in the sand.

“Two little branches here. Close together, so my measuring stick can rest between them.”

Raffy studied the drawing.

“Like a little tree?”

“A very little tree,” said Arlo. “A fallen piece would do nicely.”

“And you’d trade the blue shell?”

“For the right piece.”

Back at the mangroves, Raffy drew the forked shape in the wet sand while Clancy watched from a root.

Clancy looked carefully.

Then he looked again.

“I’ll show Benny.”



Benny was arranging his blue pebble when Clancy returned.

“Arlo would like to trade,” said Clancy.

Benny’s head came up.

“For the shell?”

“For the shell.”

Clancy scratched the shape of Arlo’s stand into a bare patch of earth.

“A short, sturdy piece. With a little fork here.”

Benny’s violet eyes brightened.

“Oh!”

He hurried behind his bower.

Dry leaves rustled.

A twig rolled out.

Then Benny appeared, dragging a small piece of fallen timber. At one end, two short branches made a neat little fork.

“I found this beside the track,” he said.

Clancy bent to look.

“That could be just right.”

Benny studied its dull brown surface.

“It hasn’t much shine.”

He glanced at his blue flowers.

“But it has a very good fork.”



Clancy carried the timber back to the mangroves.

Raffy inspected the fork, then nudged the piece into the water. It floated beside him as he swam, pushing it ahead towards Arlo’s workshop.

Arlo turned it over.

One arm held it steady while another tested the wood. He rested his measuring stick between the little branches.

It stayed.

Arlo lifted his arms away.

It still stayed.

“Just right,” he said.

“Benny found it,” Raffy told him.

“Please thank him for me.”

Arlo reached for the blue shell. Beneath the clear water, its curved sides glowed like a little piece of deep sea.

“And this is for Benny.”

When Raffy returned to the wet bank, Clancy was waiting.

“Well?” asked Clancy.

Raffy set the shell on a flat stone.

Clancy leaned down.

“Oh,” he said softly. “He’s going to like that.”



Benny heard Clancy land.

“Did it fit?”

Clancy placed the shell on the ground.

Benny stood very still.

Light shone across the deep blue curves.

He walked around it once.

Then he came a little closer.

“Oh, Clancy.”

“Arlo says thank you.”

Benny looked from the shell to his bower.

“And I say thank you too!”

He carried it to the blue flowers and set it down.

Stepped back.

Tipped his head.

Then moved it beside the pebble.

Clancy settled on his branch.

Benny tried the other side of the feather.

Then the first side again.

At last, he stood beside Clancy and admired the little blue shell shining among his treasures.

“Just right,” said Benny.

Clancy looked over the carefully arranged collection.

“Have you still got room for one more?”

Benny’s violet eyes lit up.

“What have you found?”

A little more about Benny and his friends

Raffy's Real Discovery

Male satin bowerbirds decorate bowers with blue objects. A bower is different from a nest. Which blue treasures can you find in Benny's pictures?

A hidden visitor



Steve was quietly exploring the inland forest too. Did you spot him? Look again at picture 1. What helped you find him?

Oceanese to share

"Would you swap your shell for something?" Try offering a pretend swap with drawings or toys. Wait for your partner's answer. They may say yes, say no, point or use their own familiar way to reply.

Oceanese

Raffy and his friends invented Oceanese so different animals could talk to one another. It spread from their ocean friends to land animals too. They use sounds, movements and expressions, with time for each friend to reply. Oceanese is make-believe.

Care for their home

Enjoy watching birds with a grown-up. Leave bowers, nests, shells and other wildlife treasures undisturbed. Benny's silver treasures are part of his make-believe story. Never leave coins, foil or other objects out for wildlife.

Our ocean. Our planet. Our friends.

Let's look after them together.

Raffy's Ocean Friends is a fictional series created by James Shang. Raffy and his friends were developed for this series, inspired by the animals and waterways of Australia. In their world, they invented Oceanese so different animals could talk to one another. Story and characters by James Shang. Illustrations created with generative AI and developed through author-directed revisions. © 2026 James Shang. All rights reserved.

Nature note: Australian Museum · australian.museum/learn/animals/birds/satin-bowerbird/

Thank you for reading!

We hope you enjoyed Benny’s story and your reading time together.

Visit raffysoceanfriends.com for songs, games and colouring in. There’s more fun to share with Raffy and his friends!



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