

**Grow-up Time (Finally)**

The kids are ready for bed, the cocktails are chilled, and SpongeBob conversation can wait until tomorrow

BY TENNY ROSENSTRACH AND ANDY WARD

IF YOU COME to our

house for a dinner party, there's a good chance two kids will greet you at the door. If all has gone according to plan, they'll be bathed and pajamaed, their teeth brushed, and in bed 30 minutes later.

Quite often, it's short ribs. We love them for three reasons: They're unstopably, almost

before our guests arrive. (Okay, maybe we do worry about the crostini; it's a

problem.) It's that usually our friends are parents, too. Parents who have

spent their day doing what parents do—enduring

another *Wow! Wow!* *Wubzy!* marathon, doing

out snacks, pretending to lose at Uno—and who

probably don't feel a powerful need to spend

valuable babysitting hours doing the same with some

one else's kids. In our experience,

dinner guests are looking for a cocktail, some tasty

food, and conversation that does not begin with the words "I am counting

up at 6:30 tomorrow for a kids make their Dinner

to three..." So, after the

sock-puppet show. ■

Party Cameo (the key

is to leave your guests

wanting more), one of us

will shepherd them to bed

while the other puts the

final touch on whatever

has been braising away

in the Dutch oven.

reducing (and sweating)

while our friends stand

in the kitchen with an eye

on the clock. It's about

sipping a glass of Barbera

and diving into a dinner

that's ready to go and

simultaneously casual

and special.

When everything goes

right, you can forget (for

a few hours, at least) that

there's a Thomas the

Tank Engine track running

through the living room

and that you have to get

up at 6:30 tomorrow for a

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