David Beckham

I SPOKE to Victoria on the phone before the game. “Now don’t do anything stupid, will you?” she said. I laughed: I don’t know. I’ll see how it goes. Maybe I should just go out and kick one of them for old times’ sake.

Argentina had one or two chances. We had better ones. Suddenly Michael Owen had the ball and was twisting past Pochettino, just inside the box. The defender stuck a leg out as Michael edged beyond him.

Penalty! I’m sure I shouted it out. I know every England supporter did. I had to get to the ball. I had to be the one to score. A hungry feeling in the pit of my stomach: Dread.

Everything else I’ve done in my life, everything that’s ever happened to me — it’s all been heading towards this.

The ref, the keeper and Diego Simeone, of all people, were standing in front of me, between me and the goal. I took two or three steps back.

Simeone walked straight past the ball towards me.

He stopped and offered his hand as if he expected me to shake it. Should I? No chance. I looked beyond him — through him — towards the goal, trying to blank him out. Then, as I turned, Butty and Scholesy came from behind me and pulled Simeone away. My mates. I like that. I looked down at the ball before running up. It all went quiet.

Everything was swirling around me, every nerve standing on edge. I remember forcing in two big gulps of air to try to steady myself and take control. I was far too nervous to try to be clever. Not nervous for myself any longer. This was all about the team I was captain of. I’ve never felt such pressure before. I ran forward. And I kicked the ball goalwards as hard as I could. In the roar. IN!

Not the best spot kick you’ve ever seen. But, for me, for all of us that night, just absolutely perfect. The nerves, the pressure and four years of memories just fell away.

In those few seconds after the ball settled in the back of Argentina’s net everything that had been said or written since my red card in Saint-Etienne: The look on my parents faces at Heathrow when I got back to England: That picture of an effigy of me hanging outside a pub: The snarls from the crowd at Upton Park, and all the rest of it: Gone.