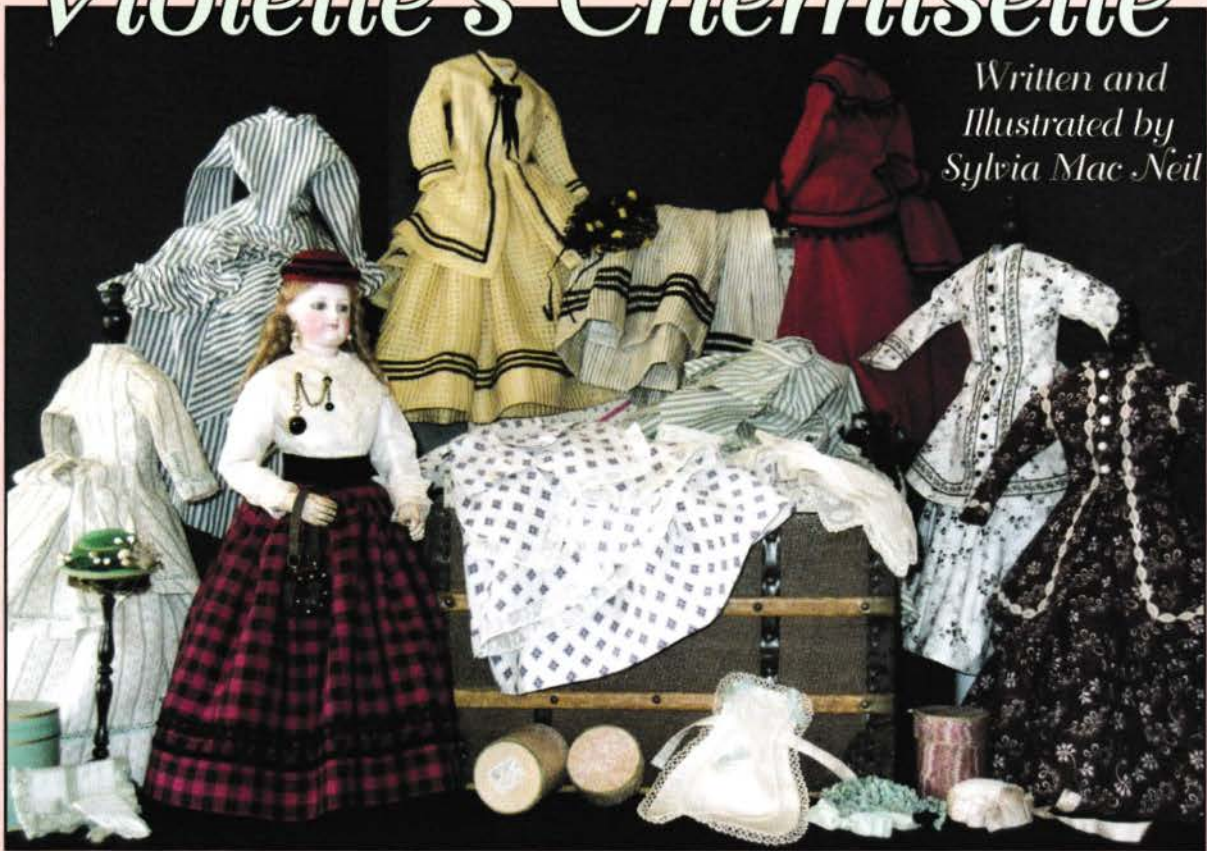


Violette's Chemisette

Written and
Illustrated by
Sylvia Mac Neil



"All elegant originalities must not be more lasting than a pretty woman's caprice, and that, everybody knows, is not of long duration."
Peterson's Magazine, July, 1873

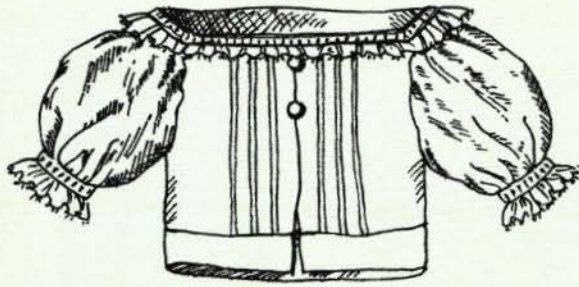
In the mid nineteenth century Paris donned its gayest attire, and the more than one hundred doll and toy shops overflowed with miniature treasures for young boys and girls. The hearts of the little folks rejoiced at the display of playthings. Above all other toys, little girls preferred dolls. There was variety enough to please even the most fastidious. On display were lady dolls with bisque or china heads, round, plump faces with peachy complexions and dimpled cheeks, rosy lips and glass eyes of deep blue. Blonde beauties always, they possessed altogether a saucy, knowing expression as they turned their heads about in every direction. Set on a number of different styles of bodies made of different types of materials, they copied admirably the ladies of the period. Offered for sale in the magical *magasins* were dresses, headgear, wraps and underwear and accessories. Indeed, every article deemed necessary to the feminine toilette was produced in miniature for these luxury lady dolls.

Resplendent trousseaus contained countless items of whitework made up in fine cotton and lightweight linen.

Chemises were edged with tiny embroidered scallops or fine Valenciennes lace. Pairs of drawers and petticoats were made to correspond. Elegant combing jackets were richly ornamented with Broderie Anglaise. Among the fancies was a *guimp*, or "body of a fichu" and matching *manches*, or undersleeves. And there were coiffes, little cotton caps to wear by day or by night, some perfectly plain, others highly decorated.

Besides the underpinnings, other pretty additions to the toilette were destined to be worn with low neckline dresses or skirts with high waistbands. *De rigueur* were dainty, little chemisettes made up in thin, white batiste, nainsook and organdies, and fine French muslins. They were fashioned with necklines high and rounded with pointed collars, or low and rounded, or low and very much squared. Sleeves were short and puffed, or long and full with dainty cuffs, while others were long and fitted. Trimmings included rows of narrow tucks, petite flounces and fluted ruffles, narrow puffings and insertions, and embroidery of the finest kind.

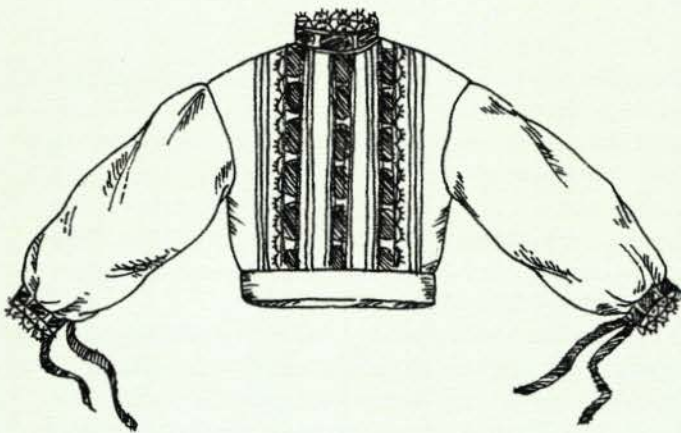
Photo: Here is Violette, modeling her white, batiste chemisette that is worn with a simple skirt of red and black checks. This doll is in the author's collection and is acquiring a rather extensive trousseau, modeled after the original trousseau belonging to the doll, Violette D'Epigny, from La Musée De La Poupée, in Paris. Displayed around the trunk are six ensembles made from the tunique pattern featured in the article, "The Summer Tunique Of Violette D'Epigny" in the October, 2007, issue.



In the first year of publication, the French magazine, so well known to the doll world today, *La Poupée Modèle*, featured a pattern for a chemisette in the June, 1864 issue. " ... a chemisette of muslin or jaconais, which will be worn with all the dresses of Miss Lily, with her vests, and above all with the dresses which don't have a bodice. The tucks are sewn with a fine running stitch. Instead of making these tucks, if you make some gathers, you will have a bodice which you can wear with any lightweight fabric, and will be very suitable for the summer dresses of your doll ... the short sleeve of the chemisette is bouffant; it is gathered on the top and the bottom, and garnished with an embroidered cuff. You can make the little flowers which edge the flounce of the cuff with embroidered dots or feather stitch with very fine cotton ... For more elegance, sew a little lace under the flounce. The square neckline of this chemisette is embroidered the same. You also garnish it with lace. You can, if you don't wish to embroider the cuff, replace it by using some *entre-deux*."

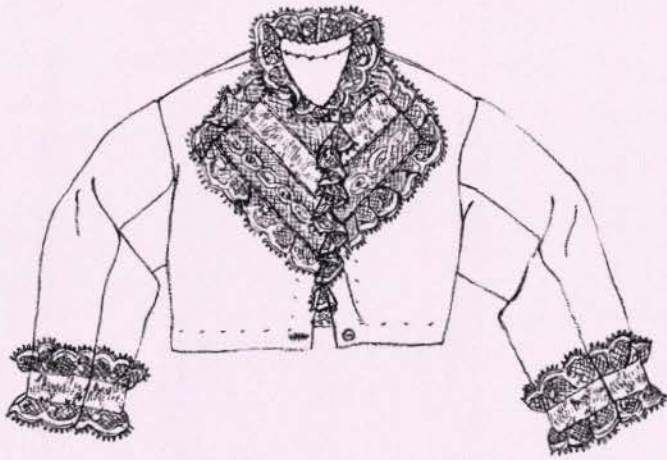
The March, 1868, issue contained two patterns " ... for size 4 dolls, a very elegant, low-cut chemisette. Size 2 dolls will find a high-necked one a little further on ... This chemisette is cut out of very lightweight muslin and is trimmed with white *guipure* and blue, green, cherry red, pink, or lilac ribbons. It can be worn with a skirt made from the same type of muslin and trimmed with similar ribbons and *guipure* ... The cuff is covered with a ribbon in the shade that you chose for the ornamentation on the chemisette; you cover this ribbon (taffeta or satin) with narrow white *guipure* about one centimeter wide, placed side by side. The front is trimmed with the same type of *guipure*, placed on a transparency of the same ribbon. Around the low neckline and the shoulders, the same ribbon is placed squarely and covered over with *guipure* ... You trim the shoulders likewise in the same way, on each side.

(A "transparency of ribbon" refers to a type of garnish formed by sewing a length of ribbon flat on the garment; it is then covered by lace of the same width, also sewn flat, without gathering it. Cluny lace, or Cluny *guipure* was the lace usually used; this lace is a little heavier and almost gives the appearance of hand made, or crocheted lace. The finer Valenciennes lace was not often used for this trim. A "ribbon transparency" was a popular garnish for ladies as well as doll clothing; it is often seen on simple, factory chemises.)



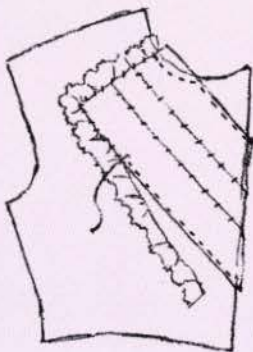
Two years later, the March, 1866, issue also had a chemisette pattern. "There are several ways to make this chemisette. First, you can make it out of plain nainsook, and embroider it as indicated on the pattern. This embroidery consists of pierced eyelets ... You could also cut out the chemisette from lightweight muslin, and instead of the large tucks, you could make tiny tucks as on the sketch, and position at intervals, between these tucks, a cotton *guipure* with large openings, like a beading lace, through which you can thread a piece of black or colored velvet ribbon. The same kind of trimming should be sewn around the neckline, around the sleeves, and should hide the seam of the shoulder."

There was little instruction for the high-necked chemisette. It was stated simply, "This chemisette ... is made out of lightweight muslin or nainsook. You trace the tucks before cutting out the bodice. The largest tuck in the front is embroidered with white or colored knot stitches, as is the cuff of the sleeve, which is a long, puffed one."

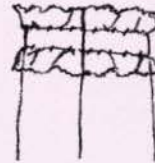
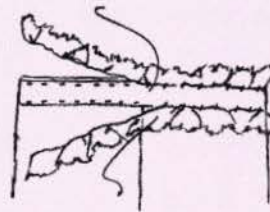
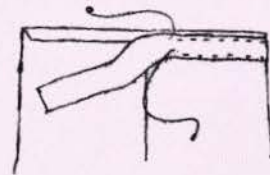


Presented here is a chemisette made from a pattern in the August, 1871, issue of *La Poupée Modèle*. It is sized to fit a doll of 15 to 16 inches. Made of a fine, lightweight batiste, it is sewn by hand, with overcasting to neaten the seam edges. Valenciennes edging and insertion and *broderie anglaise* are used as a garnish. The chemisette features details indicative of the style of this later date. Sleeves were no longer full and puffed with a cuff, but constructed with a more fitted upper and under sleeve of the coat form, made wide enough to pass the hand through. They are garnished with lace to suggest a separate cuff. It opens in the front rather than the back as the former chemisettes, and instead of the trim put on in vertical rows, it is set at an angle to simulate lapels. Earlier chemisettes had a separate waistband, while this one is simply hemmed.

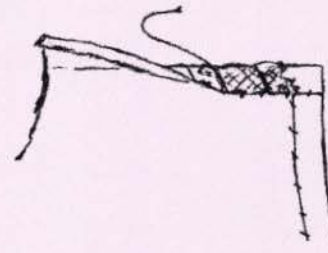
This chemisette is described in the "Explication des Travaux D'Aiguille" or, "Explanation of Needlework." "As *mesdemoiselles* the dolls, especially in this hot season, wear many bodices with low necklines, here is a pretty chemisette that can be worn with these sorts of bodices ... You make this chemisette out of lightweight muslin and you adorn it with Valenciennes *entre-deux* (false Valenciennes, of course!) or embroidered *entre-deux* forming a ruffle around the simulated lapel on the front. The hem on the front opening is garnished with scalloped lace, that is to say, gathered and sewn, turning back and forth, just to the bottom of the trimming, so as to form a *jabot*. The top of the opening is garnished with the same gathered lace ... The edge of the sleeve is garnished with embroidered muslin *entre-deux* between two rows of gathered lace, rather lightly ruffled."



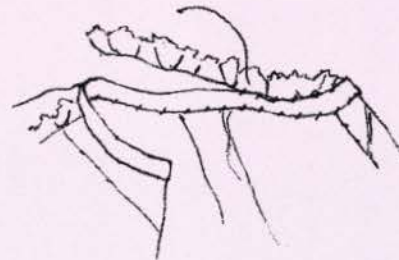
Two rows of Val insertion with one row of *broderie* in the center is set on the front, edged with gathered Val lace.



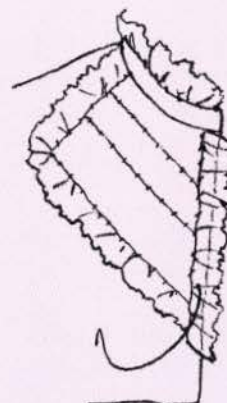
The back seam on the sleeve is sewn; the bottom edge is folded to the right side and stitched. A row of *broderie* with a row of gathered Val lace on each edge is sewn on. The front seam is then sewn. This method of trimming a sleeve when flat was often used during this period.



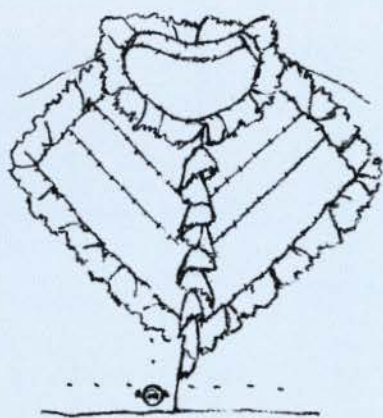
The bodice seams are sewn and the sleeves are set in. The bottom is hemmed, as well as the front opening.



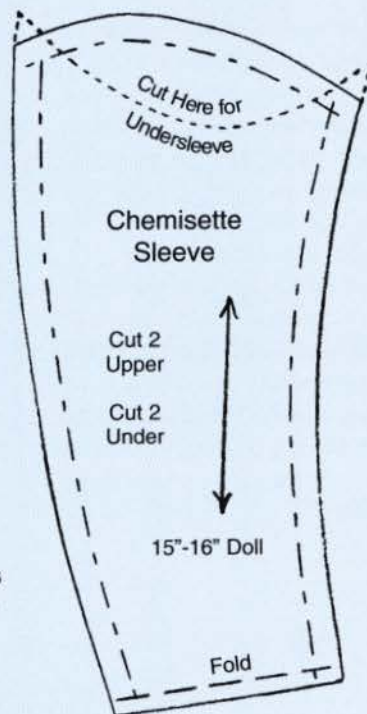
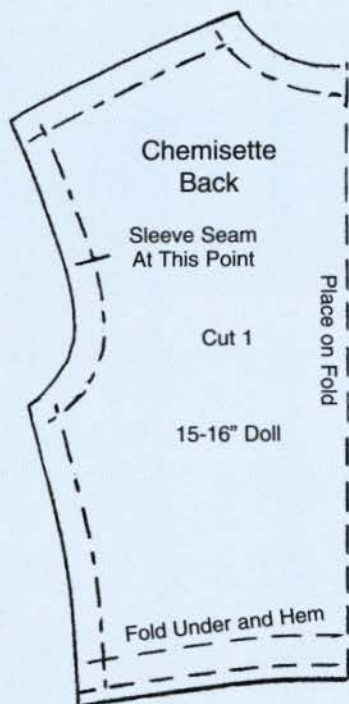
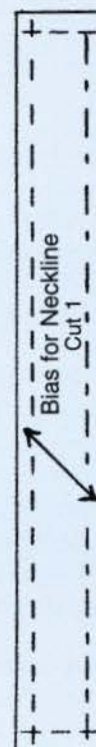
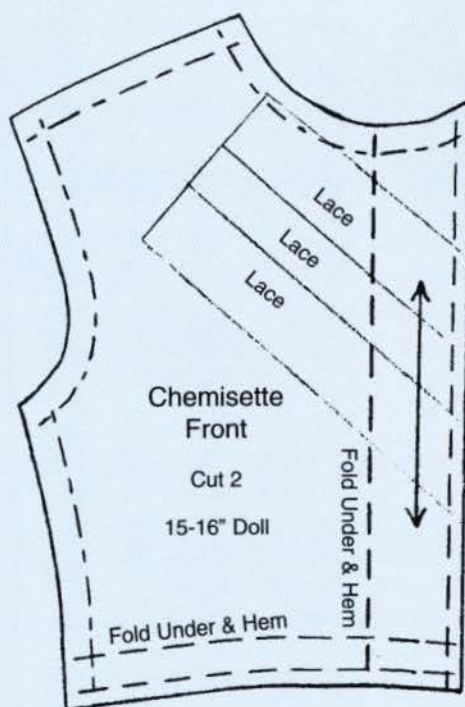
The neckline is bound with a bias strip. Gathered Val lace is sewn at the top.



A row of full, gathered Val lace is set on the front opening, 1/4 inch from the edge.



The front lace is arranged to fall back and forth like a jabot. The neckline lace is standing up at the back, and falls down, over the bias edge in front. A button and a buttonhole close the bottom, and a button with a thread loop closes the top.



Such was the fashion of the day. These elegant confections were exceedingly light and pretty, and looked especially fine when done up by a French *blanchisseuse*.

Yardage and notions:

Fine, white cotton, 12 inches by 16 inches Valenciennes lace:

14 inches insertion

1 yard 30 inches edging

Broderie Anglaise (embroidered cotton lace), 14 inches

Two tiny pearl buttons

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