Chromaticism in Figured Bass

This is a summary of the most common figured bass symbols for triads. Because this is a system that evolved over time, there is some redundancy in the functions of some of the symbols.

- Accidentals that appear to the right of the figure (number):
  - “flat”: the specified pitch has a flat accidental, but it can also mean “lower by a half step”
  - “sharp”: the specified pitch has a sharp accidental, but it can also mean “raise by a half step”
  - \ through the figure or “+” to the right: raise by a half step
- Accidentals appearing alone or without a figure next to them refer to the note that is a third above the bass
- Chromaticism in the bass has to be indicated in the notation because the figured bass cannot accommodate it
- The figures do not determine the registral placement of the upper notes (they could be at any octave above the indicated interval)
- The figures do not determine which notes might be doubled (including the bass note); doublings are up to the player

In the five examples below, all chromatic alterations are represented. For each example, two versions are given: one with the notes as close as possible to the bass, and the other where one or both notes are at a higher octave transposition.