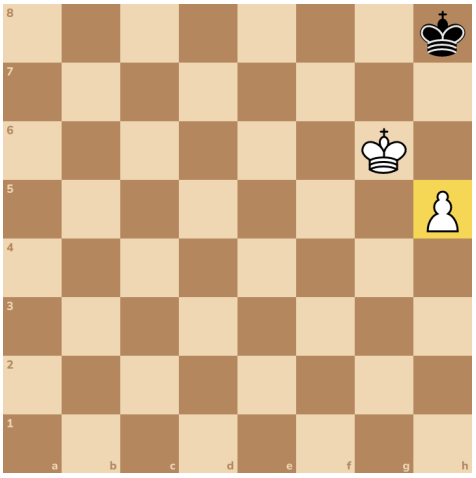
My Chess Family

The corner pawn: why a rook's pawn often draws

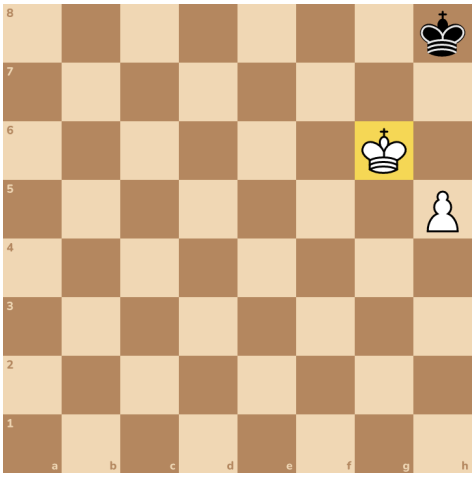
Try each question on a real board, then check the answers at the end of the sheet.

The corner pawn

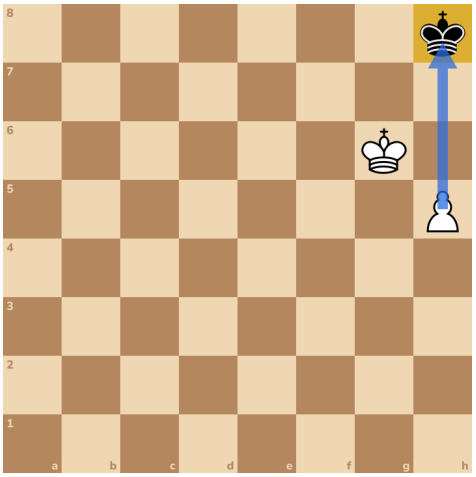
Here's a new idea. A pawn on the a column or the h column is called a corner pawn. It often gives only a draw.



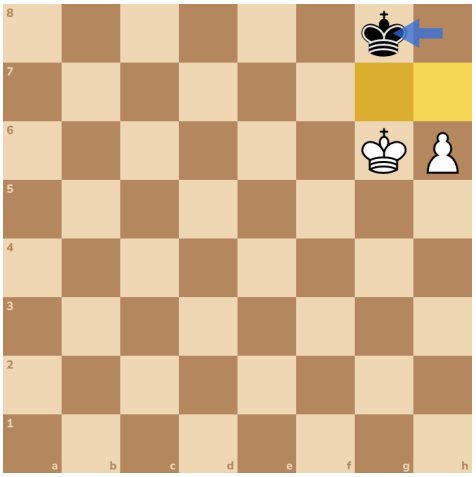
Your king is in front of your pawn. With any other pawn, that wins. Let's see what happens here, one move at a time.



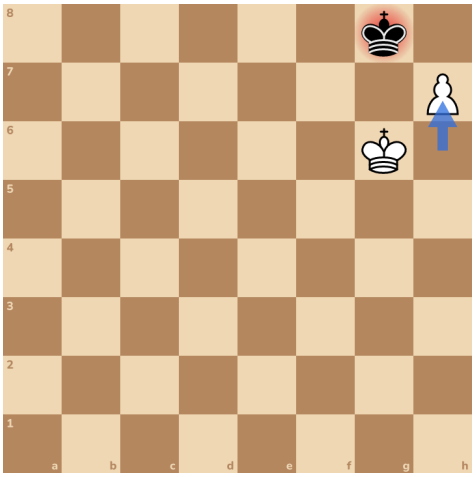
Your pawn wants to reach h8 and make a queen. But his king is on h8, in the corner.



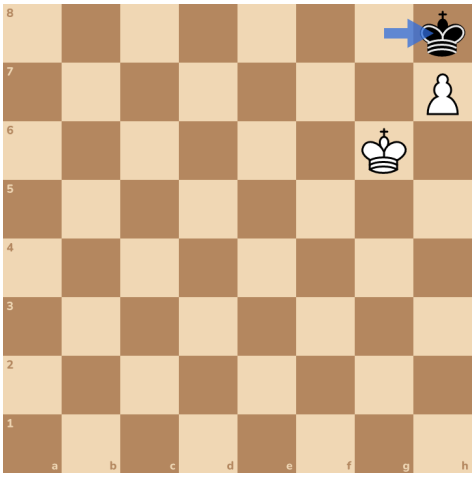
You push h6. His king can't go to g7 or h7, because your king guards them. So he steps to g8.



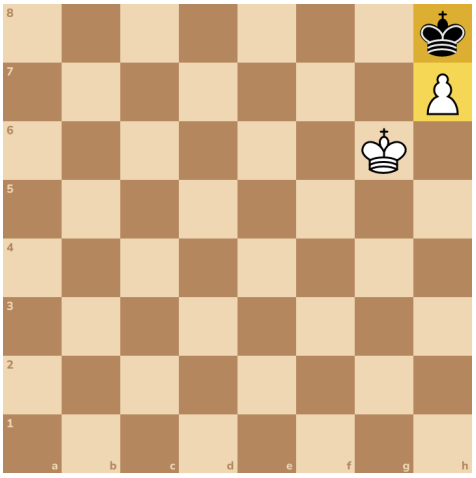
You push h7, with check.



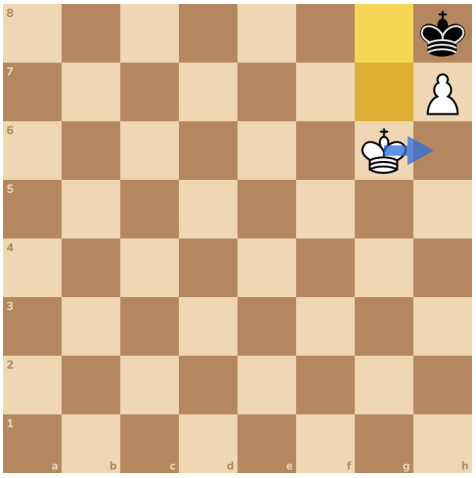
He steps back into the corner, to h8.



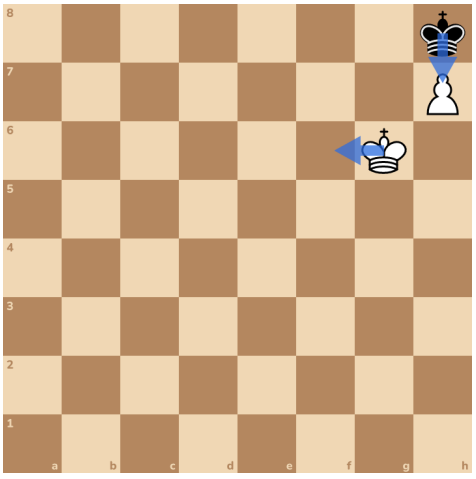
Now it's your move. Your pawn can't move, because his king is in the way. So your king has to move.



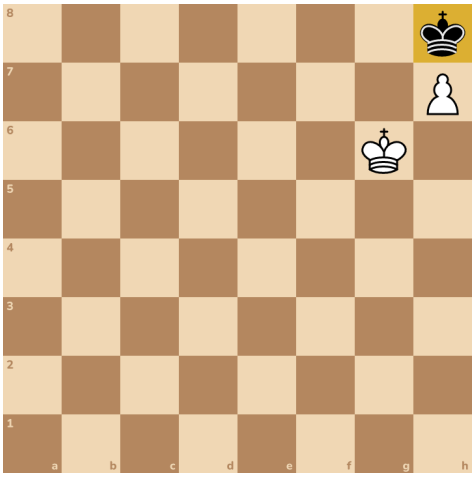
If your king stays next to your pawn, like Kh6, his king can't move and it isn't in check. That's stalemate, so it's a draw.



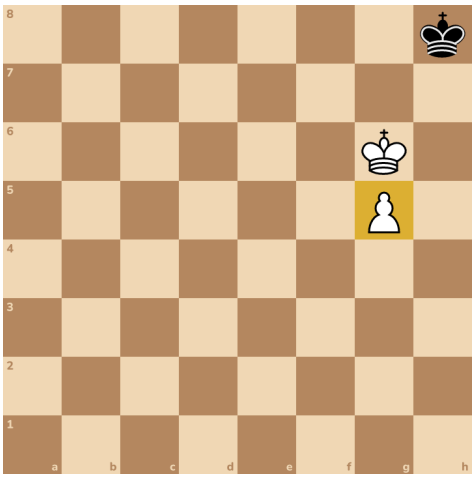
If your king steps away from h7, like Kf6, his king takes your pawn. That's a draw too.



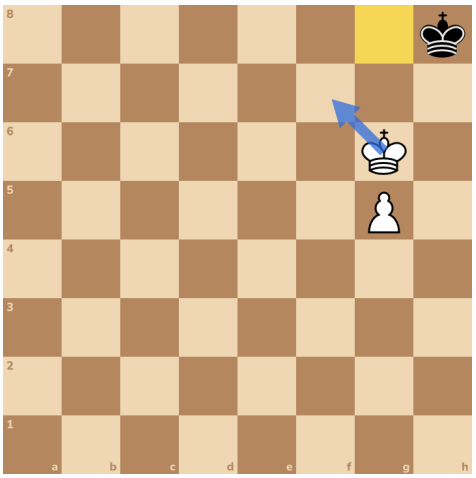
That's the problem with a corner pawn. His king hides in the corner, and there's no room to push it out.



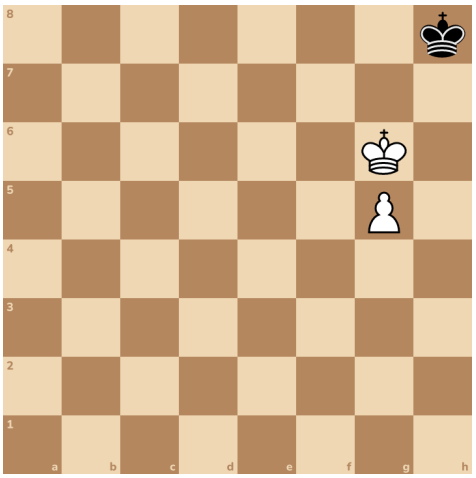
Here's a new position. It's the same, but your pawn is on g5, one column in from the edge. Now you can win.



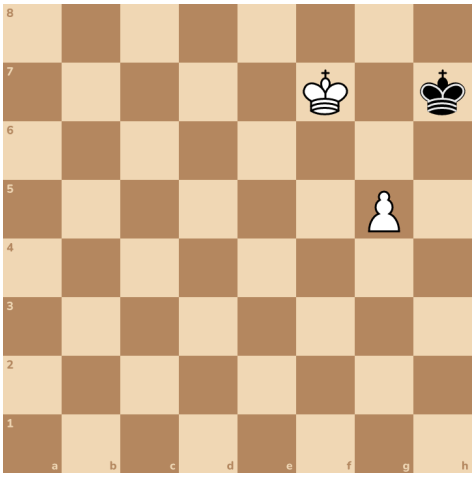
This time, there's room. Your king can step to f7, next to g8, so his king can't get in front of your pawn.



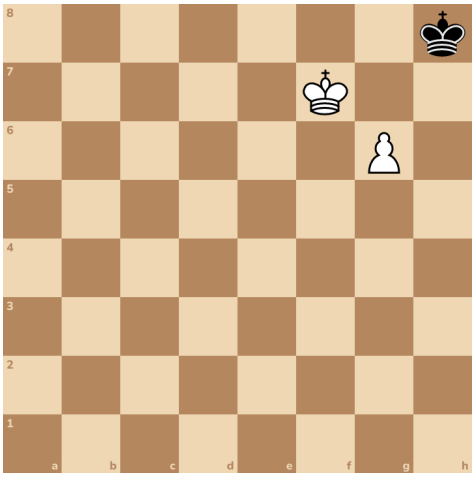
Try it 1. Step to f7.



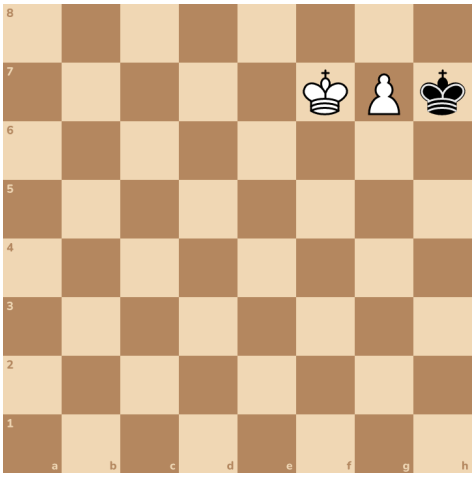
Try it 2. Your king guards g8. Push your pawn, with check!



Try it 3. Push it again, with check!

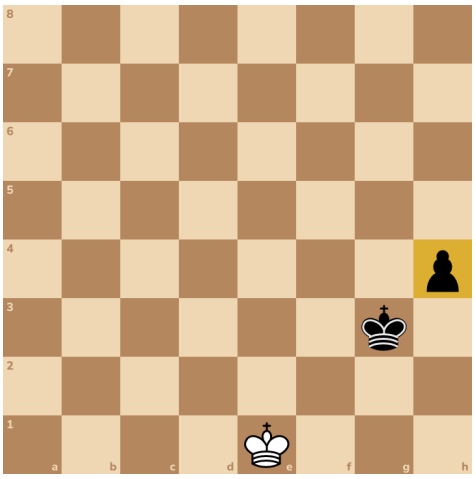


Try it 4. Make a queen!

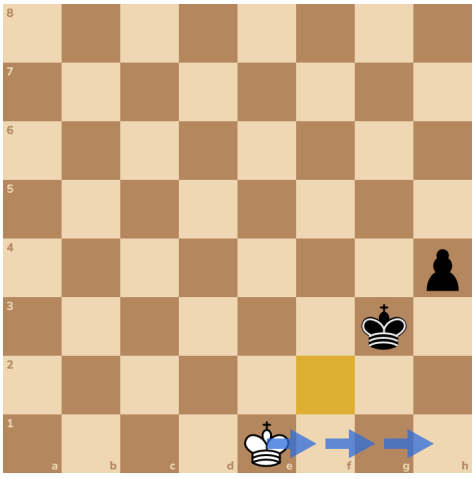


So a g-pawn wins, but an h-pawn only draws. Now let's see how that helps you when you're the one without a pawn.

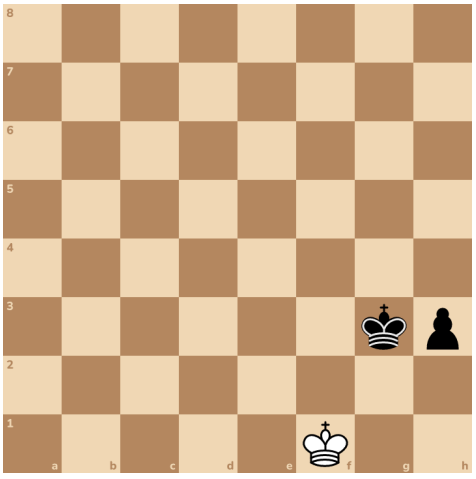
Here's a new position. He has the pawn this time, on h4. You only have your king.



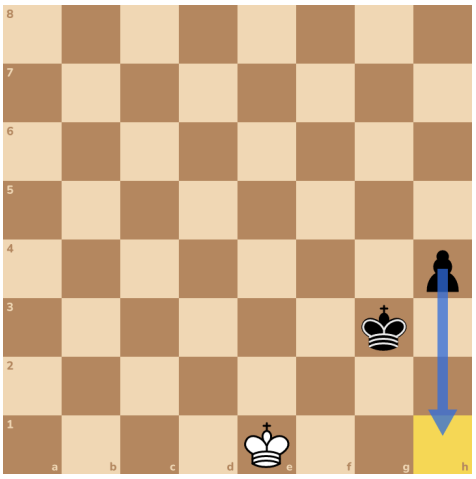
Walk along the bottom row, f1, then g1, then h1. Don't go to f2, because his king guards it.



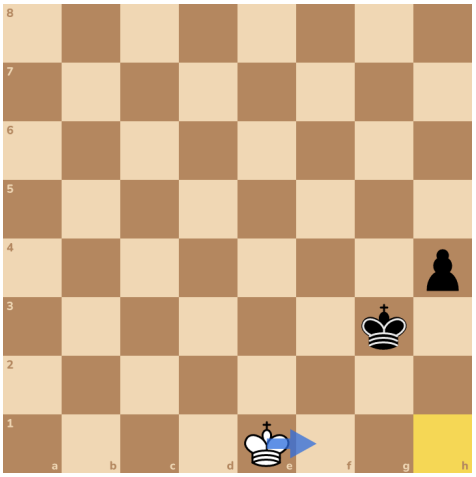
Try it 6. Keep going!



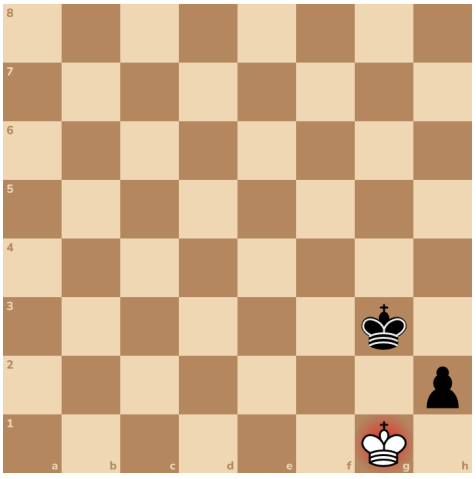
His pawn wants to reach h1. Your plan is to get your king to h1 first, into the corner in front of it. Then he can't push you out.



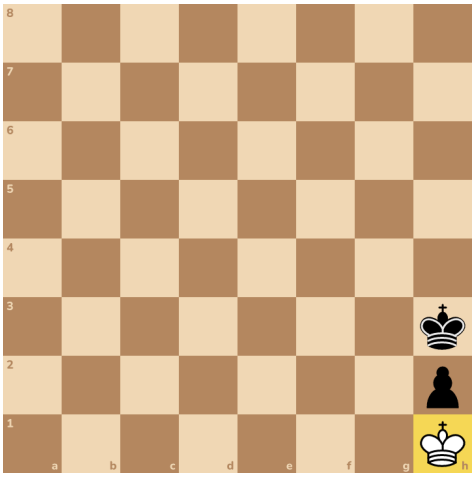
Try it 5. His pawn wants to reach h1. Run towards the corner!



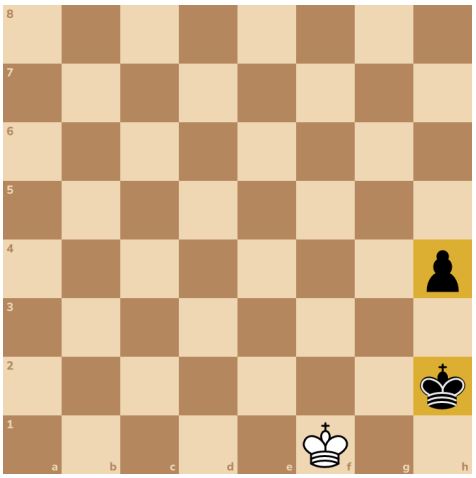
Try it 7. Into the corner!



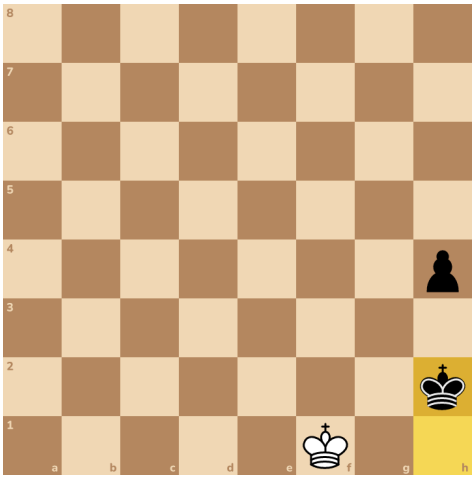
Your king can't move, and it isn't in check. That's stalemate, so it's a draw!



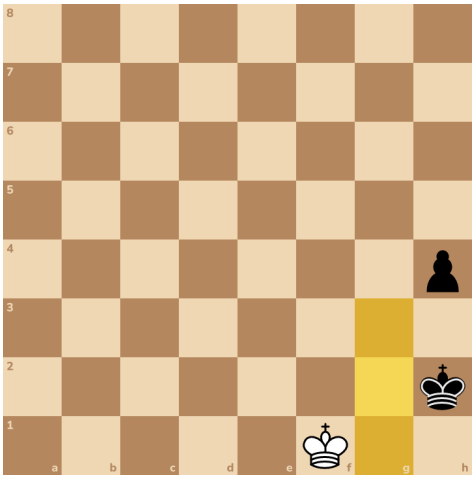
Here's a new position. This time his king got to the corner first, on h2. His pawn is behind it, on h4.



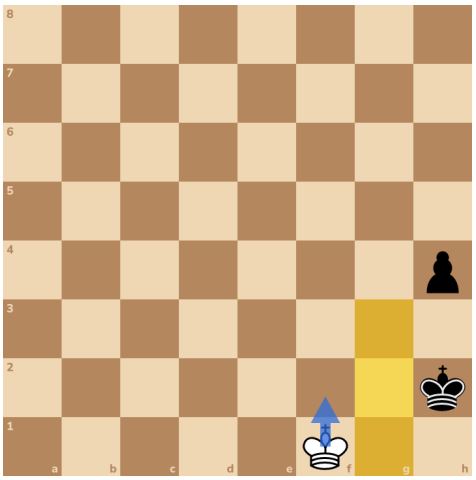
His pawn can't get past his own king. So if his king can never get out of the corner, his pawn can't make a queen.



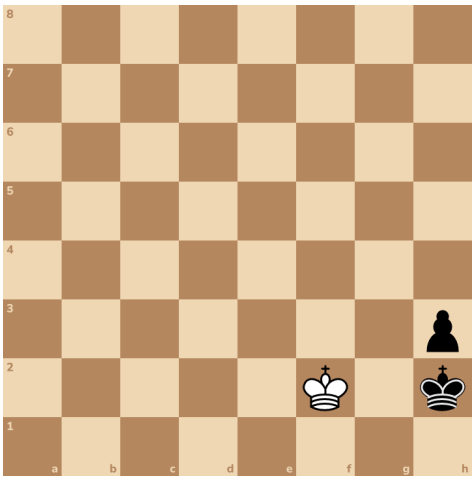
To get out, his king needs g1, g2 or g3. Your plan is to keep those squares guarded, by going from f1 to f2 and back.



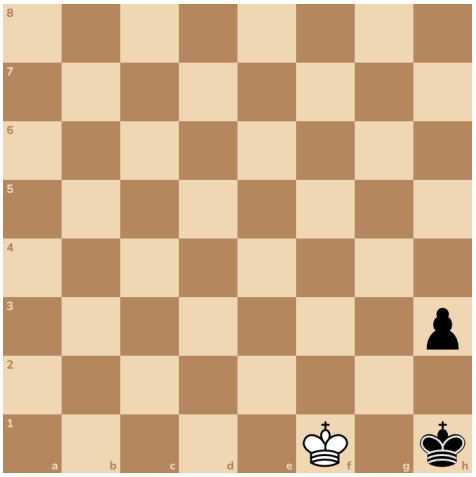
Try it 8. Step to f2. Then your king guards g1, g2 and g3, so his king is stuck.



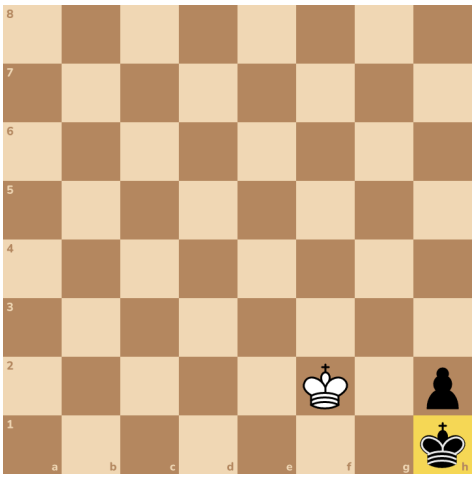
Try it 9. He pushed. Step back to f1, so you still guard g1 and g2.



Try it 10. Your turn. Keep him locked in.

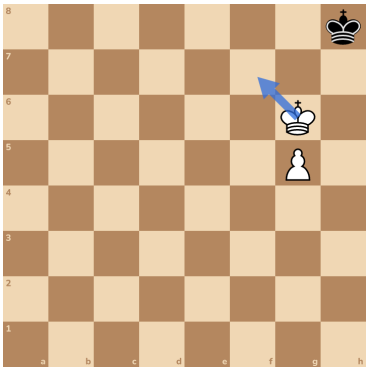


His king can't move, and it isn't in check. Stalemate again! Against a corner pawn, the corner gets you a draw.

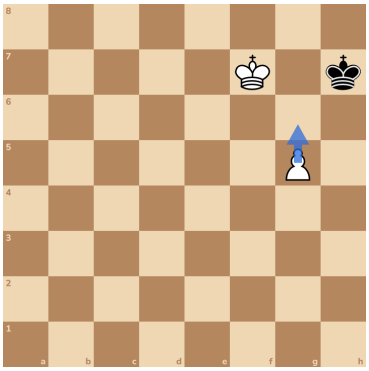


Answers

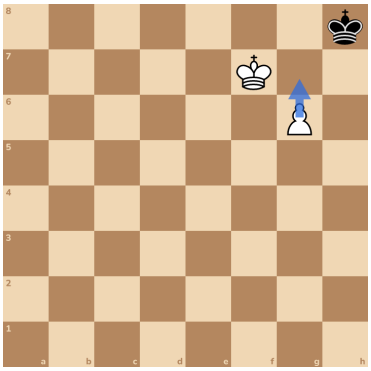
1. Kf7



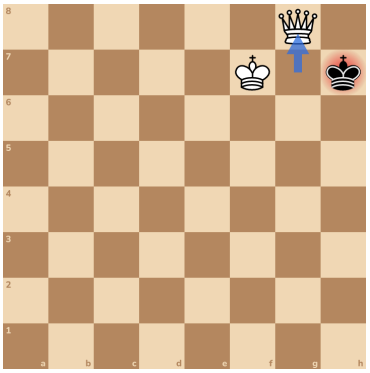
2. g6+



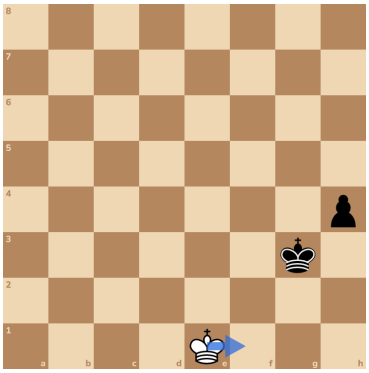
3. g7+



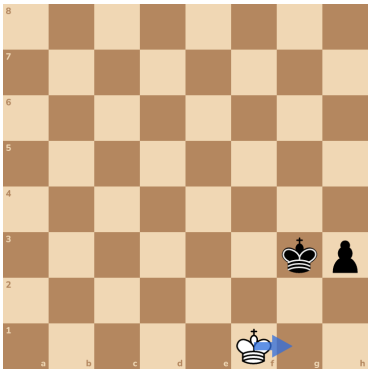
4. g8=Q+



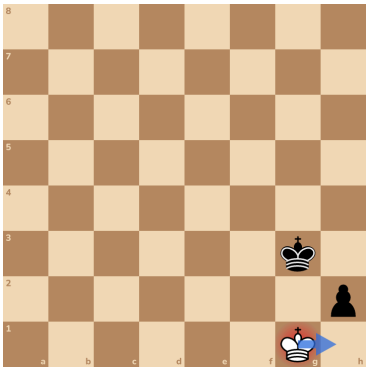
5. Kf1



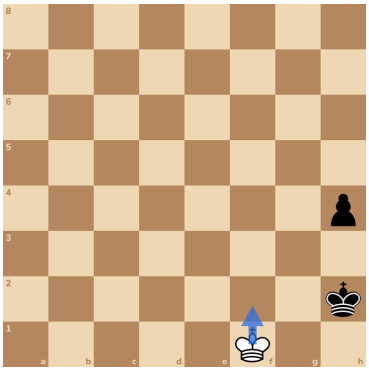
6. Kg1



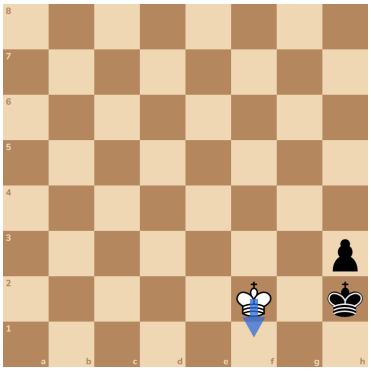
7. Kh1



8. Kf2



9. Kf1



10. Kf2

